



Fostering Social Norms for Sustainability: A Comparison of Two Community  
Socioeconomic Initiatives

by

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## Statement of Ethical Conduct

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## Abstract

In the socioeconomics literature, community socioeconomic initiatives (CSIs) are identified as important institutions for achieving sustainability. In this literature, CSIs are argued to contribute to sustainability by fostering a set of compatible social norms of reciprocity, equity, deliberation and sufficiency. This dissertation investigates the potential of CSIs to foster such sustainability norms by comparing and contrasting two different CSI types: community supported agriculture (CSA) and local exchange trading systems (LETS). To undertake the comparison, each sustainability norm is further elaborated in indicators linked to their capacity to encourage volunteering, redistribution, dematerialization, prosumption and purposeful social interaction. Drawing on literature reviews of international case studies and participant-observation and interviews of two Tasmanian CSIs, the research finds that while both types of CSIs foster sustainability norms, they do so in different ways and to different degrees. The research has important implications for sustainability strategies as it implies that a diversity of CSIs are required to foster the full suite of sustainability norms.

## 1. Introduction

While the most effective means of achieving sustainability are highly contested, ultimately it cannot be disputed that sustainability in a contemporary context ultimately refers to human survival, to whether and how modern and ‘glocalised’<sup>1 2</sup> (Robertson, 2012) forms of human societies can be sustained into the future. Beyond this literal definition of sustainability exists a plethora of framings indicating possible pathways to achieving human survival in the long term. For this dissertation, sustainability is assumed to occur via the efficient functioning of three life support systems, so called because they are all necessary to sustain human life, given the fact of human interdependence. These are ecological, social and economic life support systems. Ecological systems provide the necessary ecosystem functions that human life depends on. Social life support systems are both an end in themselves and are necessary for efficient material production<sup>3</sup>. Economic systems provide the material goods needed for existence such as food, water and shelter.

The focus here is on socioeconomic systems, since firstly maintaining functional ecosystems is outside the scope of this dissertation, and secondly it is assumed that a focus on improving socioeconomic systems will of itself contribute to improved ecosystem functioning, particularly by the reduced use of resources. The way we organise socioeconomic systems has implications for resource use, particularly in terms of transaction costs (Gundlach and Achrol, 1993)<sup>4</sup>. We have tended to rely on systems that have high transaction costs, with negative implications for ecosystem functioning. One challenge therefore is to reduce these costs.

As Kimbrough and Wilson (2013) note, the survival of both small tribes and large societies over history has depended on how well groups maintain order (by constraining anti-socioecological behaviours), manage resources, and trade with

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<sup>1</sup> It also could be said that contemporary society consists of ‘glocalised’ lifestyles - impacted both by globalising and localising forces.

<sup>2</sup> Haan (2000) defines glocalisation as relating to a trend towards global markets and politics, occurring simultaneously with increased diversity and increased importance of regionalism and community.

<sup>3</sup> This is a major basic assumption of socioeconomics.

<sup>4</sup> As Gundlach and Achrol (1993) note, transaction costs are the costs of organising exchange, particularly negotiation, collecting and analysing information, and monitoring and managing performance.

others, to meet socioeconomic needs, while adapting to changing environments. In short, socioeconomic needs must be met for all, and increasingly in modern societies they must be met in an equitable and efficient manner. The latter is in part due to large current and expected population levels, combined with large current and expected average per capita consumption levels (Ehrlich and Ehrlich, 2008). To date the focus to ensure human survival has been on economic systems, in terms of the satisfying of material needs via market exchange (Rees, 2008). This ‘economism’ refers to the privileging of economic systems to the extent of undermining both social and ecological systems (Brandt, 1995). A belief in free market capitalism<sup>5</sup> as the best (and only) means of organising the production and distribution of material goods, and the use of a particular type of medium of exchange<sup>6</sup>, are additional sources of the undermining of social and ecological systems (Offe, 2000; Greco, 2009). Ever increasing economic growth has become entrenched socially and politically as a desirable end goal of all socioeconomic activity, rather than as a means that, combined with functioning socioecological systems, can promote qualitative improvement in the human condition (Streeck, 2011). This belief in economic growth as an end goal in one sense however, can merely be seen as arising from an understandable historical view that material scarcity is the greatest threat to human survival, particularly due to the vagaries of nature in guaranteeing a sufficiency of materials on which human survival depends (Martinez, 2007).<sup>7</sup> However the consequent undermining of socio-ecological systems by this focus on economic growth, is now threatening the very material security that human endeavour has been so focused on achieving.

On the one hand, the capitalist economic model has been spectacularly successful over the course of human history in raising productivity, increasing standards of living and developing science and technology (Boyden, 2004). However this focus on quantitative and material development has come at a cost. The capitalist

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<sup>5</sup> It should be noted however that there are many variations of ‘market capitalism’ in practice, from socially orientated models to more laissez faire models. I thank the reviewers for pointing out that markets cannot be seen as black or white, that some of the new literature on markets highlights an element of ‘soft norms’. Likewise I thank the reviewers for their many other helpful comments on the rest of the thesis.

<sup>6</sup> As will be discussed, state controlled money has implications for sustainability.

<sup>7</sup> The fundamental problems humanity faces have their roots in the scarcity of the resources that sustain life, because the world is finite and we are exhausting and polluting those resources. Notice how this mirrors the basic assumption of modern economics of choice under scarcity.

economic model that is so intertwined with the goal of material security can be seen to have contributed to at least three factors that are now impacting on the successful meeting of socioeconomic needs, and which are forcing change (in the form of adaptation and/or intentional change). These are firstly both the actual ‘end of growth’ and the need for the ‘end of growth’. Klitgaard (2010) identifies three sets of limits (biophysical, economic and political) which point to the growth economy as an impossibility into the future. In doing so he highlights trends of secular stagnation and secular unemployment, being major indicators of the failed growth economy. The need for the end of economic growth is becoming more and salient as the effects of climate change are becoming increasingly noticeable. Hence the end of the economic paradigm presents both a danger, to the extent current political-economic systems rely on growth, and an opportunity, particularly to reduce negative human impacts on ecosystem functioning. The corollary is the possibility of also reducing the inequality that accompanied the drive for economic growth, as noted by Marx and Engels (in Pearson 1995).

The second factor is of increasing unemployment, both technological, as highlighted by authors such as Rifkin (2004) and Ford (2013), and arising from a lack of demand, as discussed by Klitgaard (2010). This again poses both a danger and an opportunity. Employment is vital for quality of life on the one hand, but on the other hand there are significant levels of ‘over-work’ or time stress experienced by many people (Hamermesh and Lee, 2005). An increase of discretionary time may help to increase socio-political engagement, to the extent that a lack of time increases disengagement (Ginsborg, 2005).

The third factor relates to a ‘window of opportunity’<sup>8</sup> for the type of change needed to address these significant challenges. This is based firstly on the strong possibility that currently material sufficiency exists at the global and perhaps regional level, as detailed in the post-scarcity literature (Chernomas, 1984; Giddens, 1995). In other words, given equitable distribution, there is currently enough goods and services produced to meet basic material needs for all<sup>9</sup>. This

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<sup>8</sup> In terms of a limited period of time when there is likely to be an opportunity for positive change, otherwise future change may be negative, such as both worsening environmental and socio-political conditions.

<sup>9</sup> This raises the question of what basic needs are, and the difference between basic needs and culturally accepted standards of living, which is also important. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to address these issues.

possibility has profound implications for socioeconomic systems, addressing as it does the very rationale of 'economics', commonly defined as a system for allocating scarce resources. Post-scarcity therefore provides the potential for a major transformation of socioeconomic systems, including re-balancing of social and economic systems.

The increasing evidence of fatal contradictions of the capitalist system is highlighted by the literature on post-normal science. Both secular stagnation (the failed growth economy) and secular unemployment can be seen to be signature aspects of 'post-normality'. For Sardar (2015), 'the normal' is 'what is accepted as the dominant way of being, doing and knowing' (p 27). He continues that 'the normal' comprises of a number of firmly entrenched concepts, including modernity, postmodernism, free market capitalism, top down politics and runaway technology. One particular aspect of our post-normal times is the gradual decline of the narrative which has more or less sustained humanity through the Industrial Age to the current age- that economic growth is the means by which all things we value can be achieved, and that the 'working society' is the only means of achieving it. The 'end of growth' and rising unemployment however is gradually eroding the once widespread confidence in the economic growth narrative. Other factors such as post materialism, the thesis that once material needs are satisfied, other values become important such as self-expression (Welzel and Inglehart, 2005), are also contributing to the end of the dominant socioeconomic and political narrative.

An opportunity currently exists therefore where the old narrative is receiving less and less support, in other words is becoming less legitimate, thus opening the opportunity for the development and adoption of a new paradigm.<sup>10</sup> The current opportunity provided by material sufficiency, whereby the material needs of all can potentially be supplied with a much lower levels of human labour than was previously possible, increases the opportunity to spend less time on material provisioning, and more time on other means of increasing quality of life. The trend as automation increased during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries of tending to seek

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<sup>10</sup> As Canal (1988) notes, paradigms shape what we see and what we understand. He notes that while ever more sophistication is being achieved regarding biophysical forms of science and technology, our paradigms are drastically outdated, hence are not adapting to change such as that generated by technological advances.

increased earnings rather than decreased working hours (LaJeunesse, 2010) may potentially be reversed. However this opportunity will likely disappear if and when a scarcity of some non-renewable resources becomes more salient, combined with increasing employment insecurity. In one respect we are ‘on the brink of affluence’ (Stutz, 2010), but our current lack of adequate progress in changing societal goals is threatening to return us to the struggle for subsistence. The post-scarcity world within our grasp may slip away without attending to the forces which undermine it. The time is ripe now therefore, as Costanza (2103) contends<sup>11</sup>:

[w]e have never had greater global capacity, understanding, material abundance and opportunities to achieve these [sustainable wellbeing] objectives. This includes scientific knowledge, communications, technology, resources, productive potential, and the ability to feed everyone on Earth (no pg)

The current era of transition, of ‘post-normality’ provides a fundamental opportunity for replacing the vision of quantitative growth, of ever increasing standards of living and material wealth, with qualitative growth. Verstegen and Hanekamp (2005), note that while material progress has limits, immaterial progress, in terms of increasing quality of life does not. Qualitative growth rather than quantitative growth may satisfy our ‘strong urge to grow’ (Verstegen and Hanekamp 2005).

A new compelling vision such as a focus on quality of life is crucial particularly given Jacoby’s (in Verstegen and Hanekamp, 2005) comment that ‘[f]ew envision the future as anything but a replica of today—sometimes better, but usually worse. . . . A new consensus has emerged: There are no alternatives’ (p 359). Verstegen and Hanekamp (2005) then comment that ‘[t]his is the wisdom of our times, an age of political exhaustion and retreat’ (p 359). However Eckersley (2005) adds to Costanza’s (2013) optimism in stating:

[t]he many paradoxes and ambiguities we encounter when we examine ‘the big picture’ of human life today reflect not just its inherent complexity and our incomplete understanding of it, but also parallel processes of cultural decay and renewal, a titanic struggle as old ways of thinking about ourselves fail, and new ways of being human strive for definition and acceptance. In essence, this struggle involves a shift away from the current worldview framed by material progress and based on self-interested,

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<sup>11</sup> The concept of sustainable wellbeing, which is an important concept for this dissertation will be discussed later in this chapter.

competitive individualism, which has created ‘shallow’ democracy (for example, voting every few years for whoever promises us the biggest tax cut) and reduces social cohesion, weakens families and communities, and so diminishes quality of life and wellbeing. Replacing this construction is a new worldview framed by sustainable development and based on altruistic, cooperative individualism, which will give rise to ‘deep’ democracy (embodied in all aspects of our lives), greater social cohesion, strong communities and families, and so heightened quality of life and wellbeing (p 10).

The current era has been called the ‘Anthropocene’ (Steffen et al., 2011), which as well as highlighting the profound negative effect humanity has had particularly on ecosystem functioning, also points to our current capacity to intentionally shape our future in a sustainable direction. The literature (for example see Stutz, 2006) suggests that the current transition is towards the goal of equitable and efficient wellbeing (via a focus on satisfying socioeconomic needs, both material and nonmaterial). For Ormel et al. (1999), it is wellbeing (or quality of life) that is the central goal of human activity.

This dissertation draws in particular on Costanza’s (2013) concept of sustainable wellbeing as a replacement for the goal of economic growth to achieve sustainability, in terms of human survival into the future <sup>12</sup>. Sustainable wellbeing is defined in this dissertation as the equitable and efficient meeting of socioeconomic needs. In turn Bruni (2008) highlights relationality as a crucial aspect of wellbeing. A crucial aspect of relationality is mutual exchange, that is, exchange that is beneficial to both parties. The term beneficial exchange will be used interchangeably with mutual exchange hereon. We have benevolent attitudes towards others if we are engaged in relationships with them based on mutual exchange. Wherever a grouping of people relies on division of labour, there needs to be a system of exchange. Exchange provides the opportunity for two types of gains, in terms of satisfying both economic needs or material needs, and social needs (O’Neil, 2008). More broadly, exchange has always been a means of reducing risk, and is especially important during post-normality, of dealing with uncertainty. Exchange is a common element of both the declining paradigm of economic growth as the central goal of human activity, and the emerging paradigm of the explicit achievement of physical and social wellbeing as the central societal goal.

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<sup>12</sup> It is not intended here to downplay the importance of viewing ecosystems and nature generally for its intrinsic value



Mutual exchange refers to mutual dependence (that is, interdependence<sup>13</sup>), which is indispensable for sustainable wellbeing, but poses a major societal challenge. Both from a utilitarian and instrumental point of view, particularly to benefit from division of labour and specialisation, and due to our deep need for social interaction and belonging to a group, cooperation adds significantly to human wellbeing (Bruni, 2008). We have relationships of ‘obligate dependency’ on the one hand, on the other hand social interaction enriches our life. However as Etzioni (2003) implies, we are fundamentally conflicted between the desire to exchange to benefit others and the desire to use unequal or negative exchange (to receive more than one gives) to only benefit ourselves.<sup>14</sup>

Sahlins (1972) introduced the term negative exchange, where one benefits more than the other, to denote the opposite of mutual exchange, where both parties benefit more or less equally. Negative exchange comprises of unequal exchange, or seeking to gain ‘something for nothing’ (also see Befe 1977). This is also known by other terms such as free riding, opportunism, and psychological egoism (Frey, 1997). The term negative exchange is used here to maintain the emphasis on exchange as a predominant human activity, forming the basis of social, economic and political systems. Negative exchange poses a significant challenge to our modern interdependent way of life. The economic growth model has exacerbated norms of negative exchange, being based on a belief in the legitimacy of extra material rewards arising from negative exchange accruing to those who will then maximise economic growth to ostensibly benefit everyone. Hence as Lynch (2008) notes, ‘market egoism’ is legitimated and incentivised by the capitalist economic model.

Given the importance of exchange, exchange relations, in terms of the way exchange is mediated, then becomes central. Bell (1991) indicates that the conventional view of exchange as giving one thing and receiving another can be more broadly interpreted such as via his definition of exchange relations. Bell (1991) defines exchange relations as a ‘sequence of material and affective flows

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<sup>13</sup>In a formal sense, interdependence is said to exist when individuals share common goals and each individual’s outcomes are affected by the action of others (Johnson 1998).

<sup>14</sup>There is a large and perhaps increasing number of other authors all pointing to the same dynamic of the co-existence of and conflict between egoism and altruism, such as in the metaeconomics theory of Lynne (2006) and Levine (2006).

between parties' (p 254), indicating that it is not necessarily based on direct giving and receiving, and includes both material and nonmaterial components.

The fact that negative exchange is a temptation that some cannot resist, whereby some receive but don't give, or attempt to get something for nothing, leads to the challenge to maintain social life of enforcing the giving side of the equation (that is, for those who are able to give). Giving here refers to the providing of value to others, which includes both material and nonmaterial value.

This giving, and norms in general, can be established either by conformity (voluntarily via internalised norms) or by compliance (by external means). McKenzie-Mohr and Smith (1999) detail this distinction, showing that compliance, based on external sanctions, is effective only when the rewards and punishments are in place, and is expensive to administer. Compliance is necessary in part to the extent the individual does not necessarily believe the norm is the 'right' norm to follow (McKenzie-Mohr and Smith 1999). Compliance is based on the concept of 'give or you will not receive', rather than the more positive concept as giving being in one's own enlightened self-interest, recognising that the wellbeing of all is interconnected, thus helping others achieve wellbeing enhances our own wellbeing (Jordan et al., 2004). This latter internalisation of norms, necessarily complemented by community sanctioning, reduces the need for costly compliance strategies. Compliance processes such as provided by the judiciary are still needed when community sanctioning fails, but the less the reliance on such processes, the lower the resource use.

The concepts developed by Sahlins (1972) of generalised and balanced reciprocity correlate respectively to conformity as a means of establishing norms, and compliance. Conformity via generalised reciprocity is a one end of the spectrum of exchange relations, being an efficient but internalised norm dependent media of exchange. Compliance is at the other end as a more costly strategy, but which uses stronger forms of sanctioning, of balanced reciprocity. The general term of reciprocity based on Komter (2007) is defined here as giving either directly or indirectly in response to receiving. In other words, providing value to others either

directly or indirectly in response to receiving value from others.<sup>15</sup> When the term reciprocity is used by itself in this dissertation, it refers to the general concept of giving and receiving, which covers both giving as an end, and giving as a means of receiving.

Based on Sahlins (1972), reciprocity is then delineated into the two terms of generalised and balanced reciprocity, on the basis of whether the giving is motivated by the internalised norm of a belief in the obligation to provide value to others (conformity) in the case of generalised reciprocity, or the threat of not receiving (compliance) or other forms of punishment. Generalised reciprocity refers to giving indirectly in response to receiving. Here one gives not with the direct expectation of receiving, but because of an internal motivation (feelings of obligation) to give (see Bruni 2008). This is an 'other-orientated' concept, of recognition of the needs of others, and that one's own needs depend on the satisfaction of the needs of others. Generalised exchange is used interchangeably with generalised reciprocity. The second category is balanced reciprocity, where there is explicit expectation of a direct return, hence it is defined as giving directly in response to receiving. This is a more of a self-orientated concept, of concern with one's own needs rather than the needs of others.

There are three reasons for identifying generalised reciprocity as a sustainability norm. The first is that generalised reciprocity leads to a reduction in transaction costs, via reduced reliance on the more costly compliance (Poppo and Zenger, 2002). The second is that generalised reciprocity is the basis for balanced exchange, in other words for economic activity, an insight contributed to by socioeconomics, and feminist, heterodox economics (Power, 2006). The latter highlights how productivity depends on socialisation (in other words, economic or market exchange depends on social relations). A related argument is that since all contingencies cannot be specified in contracts, an element of goodwill, or generalised reciprocity is required (Rao, 2003). The third is that generalised

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<sup>15</sup> An ecocentric perspective would contend that the definition of 'others' includes nature, and since all human life receives or is dependent on receiving value from nature, reciprocity demands providing value back to nature, such as active conservation of nature.

reciprocity is the basis of social sanctioning, as a main means of enforcing norm compliance (Etzioni, 2000), as will be discussed further in chapter two.

Generalised reciprocity is therefore identified as the first sustainability norm. Three other norms are identified as necessary to combat 'unsustainability norms' that have been promoted by the single focus on economic growth, combined with other factors. In particular a failure to adequately maintain collective agreements to control negative exchange is one such factor (Johnson, 2009). As well as negative exchange, inequity, inefficiency and socio-political disengagement are identified as major barriers to the meeting of socioeconomic needs. These norms lead to ever increasing transaction costs, which is increasingly problematic in the light of ecological unsustainability, as well as the narrative of resource shortages. Therefore the three other sustainability norms identified are equity, efficiency and deliberation. These norms in part derive from Costanza's (2013) concept of sustainable wellbeing, whereby he mentions fair distribution and efficient allocation of resources as important requirements to achieve sustainable wellbeing.

Given that markets and the state have difficulties in adequately satisfying socioeconomic needs (Bowles, 2011) at the heart of sustainable wellbeing, communities are considered by some as having the capacity to address these shortcomings of the market and state (Everingham, 2011). Communities are defined in this dissertation as having three elements. They are place-based groups of people who engage in joint socioeconomic need satisfaction, who socially sanction each other, and who use generalised reciprocity as their main means of exchange. Communities have unique advantages for the fostering of norms based on their capacity for monitoring and enforcing norms of reciprocity. This includes the fact that it is via our closest ties that we experience our dependence on reciprocity. However place-based communities which are highlighted here as the main source of generalised reciprocity (in terms of positive social relationships) have declined (Kusenbach, 2006; Geoghegan and Powell, 2009). In addition, place-based communities may also not necessarily promote norms of equity, efficiency and deliberation to the same extent as reciprocity.

Community socioeconomic initiatives (CSIs) are proposed however as having the potential to strengthen communities to foster all four sustainability norms. CSIs are defined as members of a place-based community cooperating together via norms of generalised reciprocity to satisfy one or more basic socioeconomic needs. CSIs can potentially indirectly foster norms in a procedural sense, by increasing social interaction and therefore increase the capacity of the community to socially sanction each other. However it is their potential to directly foster norms in a substantive sense that is the focus in this dissertation.<sup>16</sup>

To explore the substantive norm fostering potential of CSIs, two case studies were chosen of prominent community socioeconomic initiatives. The two case studies are located in Tasmania, an island state of Australia, with specific as well as general challenges with regards to sustainability. While Australia tends to be isolated from Europe and North America, Tasmania is even more isolated and therefore information and knowledge tends to be less accessible. Tasmania has more adverse socio-economic indicators than most other states of Australia, but perhaps partly because of this, has an active community sector. It therefore is a good location to study community socioeconomic initiatives.

The two case studies chosen were community supported agriculture and local exchange trading systems. A framework was developed to test the potential of these two CSIs to foster sustainability norms. The finding was that they both do have potential to foster sustainability norms, but differ in their capacity regarding individual norms.

The rest of this chapter summarises the main elements of this dissertation, starting with the key research questions, and the main argument relating to the findings of the research. The conceptual framework, and the underlying theory of change is then briefly outlined. The four sustainability norms are then discussed, and the links between sustainability and community are summarised. The methodology and the methods used are briefly outlined, as is finally the structure of the dissertation.

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<sup>16</sup> The use of the terms substantive and procedural is taken from Miller (2013).

## Key research questions

While there is broad support in the literature for how place based communities can contribute to fostering social norms that facilitate the full benefits of mutual exchange, the precise mechanisms by which this occurs is often not well specified. Many suggest the increasing array of community socioeconomic initiatives (CSIs) established in the past two decades—such as community gardens, local exchange trading systems, community supported agriculture, farmers markets, and so forth—have the potential to progress towards sustainability (Seyfang and Smith, 2007; Bergman et al., 2010; Middlemiss and Parrish, 2010; Tang et al., 2011). Some of these authors point to the specific characteristic of place-based communities in both being expected to, and being motivated, to ‘look after their own patch’, both socially and environmentally (also see Zuindeau, 2006). In addition, changes in norms are specifically identified as one outcome of community initiatives. Seyfang and Smith (2007) for example maintain that local action leads to ‘socially embedded changes in behaviour’ (p 587).

The parallel growth of CSIs and challenges to sustainability contributes to the hypothesis that there is a clear link between the two, a link that could be related to the role CSIs play in fostering sustainability norms. Based on this insight, this research addresses the following questions:

- Which social norms are most relevant to fostering sustainability?
- How in practice do CSIs foster sustainability norms?
- Do different types of CSIs differ in their capacity to foster sustainability norms?

## Key argument

An underlying premise of this dissertation is that we currently have a unique window of opportunity to progress towards sustainability, via a focus on wellbeing. The norms of reciprocity, equity, efficiency and deliberation are a vital component of the progression towards sustainable wellbeing. It is contended a new development paradigm of equitable and efficient sustainable wellbeing is required to maximise the chances of longer term human survival. A priority is establishing and/or strengthening structures now to maximise cooperation, given that these

structures will become even more important if and when conditions become dramatically unfavourable for establishing and maintaining cooperative institutions later (particularly for example due to material scarcity).

Ultimately sustainability is about the satisfaction of socioeconomic needs to ensure human survival, assumed to be in large part to be related to the ability of societies to act collectively to equitably and efficiently satisfy socioeconomic needs. In turn, the meeting of needs is defined as underpinning a state of wellbeing (Costanza 2013), and/or as achieving quality of life (Costanza et al. 2006). For our interdependent species the exchanging of goods and services with each other is vital to the satisfaction of needs. Wherever there is division of labour, there must be exchange.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the exchange must be perceived as being more or less equal, to satisfy norms of fairness (Etzioni, 2000). Individuals will be reluctant to exchange with others if they perceive they are consistently contributing more than they receive. In addition, the imperative is increasingly that exchange is efficient as well as equitable. Ecological sustainability requires a reduction in resource use, which can be contributed to by generating wellbeing with a lower amount of resources.

A ‘virtuous circle’ theory of change (Stutz, 2010) is drawn on whereby community groups can promote a focus on wellbeing, and then join together in coalitions capable of exerting enough pressure for policy change. This is a ‘nutcracker’ model of both bottom up and top down action (Baum, 2007) necessary for the extent of change needed towards sustainability.

One barrier to the spreading of the new paradigm is the current levels of unsustainable norms, which must be replaced by sustainable norms on which the new paradigm is based. Based on a literature review, four ‘unsustainability norms’ are identified of negative exchange, inequity, inefficiency and lack of socio-political participation in collective decision making<sup>18</sup>. These norms are likely to lead to a reduction in equitable and efficient wellbeing in terms of a reduction of

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<sup>17</sup> While recognising that many individuals for example at certain life stages cannot engage in material exchange.

<sup>18</sup> While not a focus of this thesis, the topic of ‘unsustainability norms’ is a very large and complex area. many other terms could be included such as consumerism and techno-centrism, which overlap with the four unsustainability norms identified here.

socioeconomic need satisfaction. In particular the four unsustainability norms have implications of increased resource use. Four sustainability norms are then identified as necessary to counteract these norms: reciprocity, equity, efficiency and deliberation. These will be discussed in later in this chapter and then in detail in chapter two.

Social norms (as accepted behaviours in one's group) are the basis of equitable and efficient wellbeing. It is only when behaviours are accepted by one's group that they will become more or less internalised and will not need costly coercive means of compliance. Community is identified as the 'institution'<sup>19</sup> with the greatest potential to foster sustainability norms. Community is defined as a place-based group of people who firstly have a level of commitment to satisfying socioeconomic needs within the community. Secondly, the relationships that bind the community together are based on generalised reciprocity, in other words, members provide help to others in the community without requiring a direct benefit in return. Thirdly 'true' communities engage in joint social sanctioning, as a means of enforcing norms.

This third aspect of communities as an effective means of enforcing norms (Bowles and Gintis, 1998) is important. One way of viewing the alternatives by which norms are fostered, builds on work by McKenzie-Mohr and Smith (1999). This also mirrors Sahlins (1972) concepts of generalised and balanced reciprocity. They point to a continuum of how norms can be enforced with the voluntary conformity (internalisation) of norms at one end (via generalised reciprocity), where soft, informal sanctioning can be used. At the other end is non-voluntary compliance, requiring harder more formal forms of sanctioning (balanced reciprocity). Voluntary conformity has low transaction costs, but if there is a low level of the internalisation of reciprocity norms, sanctioning towards the non-voluntary end is required (Sahlins 1972). Via one of these two means the norm of reciprocity is required for social order to be maintained; for both exchange within communities and for market exchange. In part this is because reciprocity is needed to address the incompleteness of markets and imperfect information (Algan and Cahuc, 2013).

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<sup>19</sup> Institution here refers to an entity that helps set and enforce either informal or formal rules as per North (1997).



While some element of external sanctioning is needed (Offe, 2000), a greater reliance on social sanctioning via communities is identified as the 'bedrock' of social order, for society to function via the benefits of mutual exchange.

In the modern era however very few strong communities exist (Pearson, 1995) for reasons discussed in chapter four relating to sociopolitical change. Rather people tend to live in weak communities, in part having few reasons to form strong attachments with their neighbours (Kusenbach, 2006) as once existed in the past. Community socioeconomic initiatives have the potential in a procedural sense to strengthen communities, assisted by a focus on material needs as well as social needs, and via increased purposeful social action which enables greater social sanctioning. However it is the substantive sense in which CSIs may directly foster specific norms that is the focus here. To the extent that reciprocity, equity, efficiency and deliberation are an explicit part of the CSI aims, they will tend to foster these norms. The means by which CSIs can foster these norms is a mix of counterbalancing unsustainability norms, and displacing them by sustainability norms. In other words, focusing on sustainability norms can act as a means of indirectly reducing unsustainability norms. However at the same time it is contended CSIs can counterbalance or more directly reduce unsustainability norms by communities also being vigilant about disapproving of these norms. CSIs are identified as an important element in the theory of change utilised in this dissertation, which identifies coalitions of different social movements and community initiatives as vital for longer term change towards sustainability.

### Conceptual framework - interdisciplinarity, post-normality and socioeconomics

To study CSIs and their contribution to fostering norms compatible with sustainability, it was necessary to draw on a diversity of theoretical perspectives and concepts. However the research was more specifically guided by socioeconomics. Post-normal science was also drawn on for analysing sustainability. Each will be discussed briefly in turn. Firstly a key aspect of this dissertation is the interdisciplinary nature of the research conducted. Hammond (2003) in her book *The Science of Synthesis* notes the importance of addressing complexity via relationships between the biological, ecological, social, psychological, and technological aspects of human existence.

With regard to more specific disciplinary thought, the major element of the interdisciplinary framework is socioeconomics. There are a variety of perspectives of the contribution that socioeconomics makes to theoretical debates on the best way of organising societies. Many of them focus on viewing the economy as a sub-system of the societal system, rather than the assumption of economists that they are totally separate systems (Etzioni, 2002; 2003).

Two particular contributions however are noted here firstly of Hollingsworth (2005), who contends that socioeconomics involves a focus on maintaining security, solidarity, equality and redistribution. The second is from Boyer (2008) who suggests that socio-economics relates to the investigation of the origin, transformation and impact of governance structures, in other words of markets, hierarchies, networks, associations, the state, and communities.<sup>20</sup> These two views are relevant for the understanding of socioeconomics drawn on here, in terms of the extent to which socioeconomics includes a focus on social relations as an important means by which qualitative progress occurs, rather than a sole quantitative focus on the production of material goods (Granovetter, 2005). Granovetter (2005) notes that social structures inevitably affect economic outcomes, as opposed to the neoclassical economic view of a separation between the economic and social spheres of societal systems. Socioeconomics is distinguished from neoclassical economics as the latter focuses on how we organise contractual exchange to satisfy material needs, while the former highlights how the satisfaction of non-material needs via reciprocity are also vital aspects of human interdependence.<sup>21</sup>

In essence, the lack of attention to positive social relationships that is a feature of neoclassical economics has significant and negative repercussions for economic outcomes. As Etzioni (2003) notes, this is in part because of the high transaction costs that result from a lack of what he calls ‘morality’. This idea of the need to maintain ‘morality’ and generalised reciprocity is reflected also in the literature on social capital, which highlights links between trust and economic outcomes (Annen, 2001). One core idea, then, is that while the social and the economic are

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<sup>20</sup> While adding a disclaimer that this is a simplification.

<sup>21</sup> The emerging discourse of social ecological economics (Spash 2009) adds an emphasis on the environment.

inseparable, the social dimension of an economic arrangement (in terms of generalised reciprocity) is vital for the economic dimension (that is, maximising production based on specialisation and division of labour). In short, the interdependence that social life is based on only works if there is a minimum level of the norm of generalised reciprocity.

With regards to the third element of the conceptual framework of post-normal science, the main contribution this theory makes to the dissertation is to highlight the current 'chaos, complexity and contradictions' (Sardar, 2015) leading to inevitable change, and the window of opportunity that can be seen to currently exist with regards to steering change towards sustainability. For Sardar (2015), the complexity, chaos and contradictions that is the hallmark of post-normality contributes to uncertainty and ignorance becoming increasingly problematic.

Van den Bergh (2010) points to a major source of complexity, contending that:

we humans (including in our behavior as "economic agents") show bounded rationality, myopia, a large degree of self-interest (and a smaller role for altruism), and a propensity to compare, seek status and imitate (sensitivity to fashions). Add to this the interactions between large numbers of individuals, increasing returns to scale which lead to lock-in of undesirable behaviors and technologies, and (energy) rebound, and we end up with an altogether impressively complex and difficult to alter system (no pg).

Building on the concept of cognitive limitations and institutional failure implicit in Van den Bergh's quote, Klitgaard (2010) highlights the emergence of both secular (long term) stagnation and unemployment, contributing significantly on the one hand to chaos, complexity and contradictions, but on the other hand providing an opportunity for unprecedented intentional change of social, political and economic systems. The economic growth paradigm has until recently been highly effective at providing a vision of progress to more or less unite societies. Its power and legitimacy is indicated by Eckersley (2005), who states:

[t]he primacy of growth is at the heart of the concept of material progress, which regards economic growth as paramount because it creates the wealth necessary to increase personal freedoms and opportunities and to address social and environmental problems such as unemployment, poverty, crime, pollution, land degradation and global warming. In public policy terms, economic growth means more revenue, bigger budget surpluses, and so more money to spend on more or bigger programs on social welfare, industry support and environmental protection (p 5).

The emerging failure of the growth economy however creates the need for a replacement vision, such as the direct achievement of wellbeing, rather than the contention that economic growth by itself can deliver wellbeing or welfare to all. As discussed previously, authors such as Klitgaard (2010) and Streeck (2011) make a compelling case from a number of perspectives (economic, political and ecological) that it is not possible for nation states to use ever increasing economic growth as the basis of the 'social contract' by which citizens co-exist within a nation state, in other words to manage inter-dependence. An additional line of work also identifies the focus on consumerism which inevitably accompanies a privileging of economic growth <sup>22</sup>.

At least two sets of opportunities, and two elements of danger can be identified that both promote and inhibit progress towards equitable and efficient wellbeing. The first opportunity, although commonly seen as a crisis, is the ending of the growth paradigm, making way for a new paradigm, and assisting with the difficult task of reducing reliance on economic growth. The second potential opportunity is an increase in 'cognitive surpluses', the free time possessed by individuals that can be used as a resource for the betterment of society (Walmsley, 2012). This is potentially created as automation leads to less and less labour being needed to produce the material goods needed for survival and thriving. In particular, involvement in community initiatives is one possible outcome of greater discretionary time, likewise more generally increased socio-political engagement could be a result.

With regards to dangers, the first relates to a 'decline thesis' of decreased relationships based on generalised reciprocity, threatening the satisfaction of socioeconomic needs. A second danger is a predicted return to material scarcity in terms of non-renewable resource shortages (Heinberg, 2007), for which substitutes cannot easily be found or produced. These post-normal themes are important for an understanding of sustainability challenges.

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<sup>22</sup> When producing more and more material goods is the aim of a country, markets must be found for those goods, hence consumerism is encouraged such as via advertising (see McGregor, 2003).

The next section details how socioeconomics underpins the connection between sustainability, exchange, norms and community, being the four major themes of this research.

### Connecting sustainability, exchange, norms, community and socioeconomics

The line of thought connecting sustainability, exchange, norms, community and socioeconomics is as follows. Human survival is assumed to be related to the meeting of socioeconomic needs, which in turn is related to how exchange is managed. Applying a socioeconomic lens to sustainability points to a focus on both social and economic exchange (satisfying both material and nonmaterial) needs, which is assumed to be the basis of wellbeing or quality of life (Costanza et al., 2006).

This in turn is influenced by the sustainability norms of reciprocity, equity, efficiency and deliberation. Sustainable wellbeing relies on minimising unnecessary resource use, whereas negative exchange, inequity, inefficiency and socio-political disengagement all add to a relatively high use of resources which do not add to the meeting of socioeconomic needs. Unless behaviours displaying generalised reciprocity, equity, efficiency and deliberation are established as dominant norms at the societal level, the meeting of socioeconomic needs for all (including meeting the needs of other species, and future generations) will remain highly problematic. Place-based communities have a unique capacity to monitor and enforce norms. This stems in part from proximal relationships, which allow efficient monitoring and enforcement of norms by social sanctioning (Kandori, 1992). Furthermore individuals tend to voluntarily seek community for the benefits which include the provision of social support, which cannot be provided by the market or state (Forrest and Kearns, 2001). Further details of the four sustainability norms is discussed next, with the first and foremost sustainability norm of generalised reciprocity being discussed first.

### The norm of generalised reciprocity

The general term of reciprocity is defined as giving, either directly or indirectly, in response to receiving (Komter, 2007). In other words, providing value to others, either directly or indirectly, in response to receiving value from others. Since modern societies tend to engage in substantial division of labour, exchange, in

terms of networks of giving and receiving, becomes the basis of socioeconomic life. The question for sustainability is whether reciprocity has to be facilitated by the use of a costly contract, or whether people provide value willingly to others, which then reduces resource use. The latter encapsulates the idea of generalised reciprocity, which is one of Sahlins (1972) frequently quoted forms of reciprocity (Hunt, 2002). This specifically refers to giving, or providing value as an indirect response to receiving. It is based on the idea of giving without an explicit requirement for a return benefit (Bruni 2008; Kolm (2008). Bruni (2008) defines generalised reciprocity as receiving internal rewards for providing value to others without the expectation of external rewards. Many define giving without an expectation of return as altruism. However I propose that there is a continuum from pure altruism (which is rare) to ‘quid pro quo’ or giving to receive at the other end.

Three reasons are identified for naming generalised reciprocity as a sustainability norm. The first is that generalised reciprocity leads to a reduction in transaction costs. The second is generalised reciprocity is that market exchange (which Sahlins (1972) calls balanced exchange) requires a level of generalised reciprocity. Feminist versions of heterodox economics in particular highlighted that productivity depends on socialisation (economic or market exchange depends on social relations). The third is that generalised reciprocity is the basis of social sanctioning, as a main means of enforcing norm compliance.

### The norms of equity, efficiency and deliberation

Supporting generalised reciprocity in promoting progression towards sustainability as wellbeing are the norms of equity, efficiency and deliberation. For Beder (1996), equity is based in part on the view that there are basic needs that should be satisfied by all members of society<sup>23</sup>, and that responsibilities and rewards should be roughly shared within and across communities. She contends that equity implies a minimum level of standard of living (based in large part on consumption) should be achievable by all. In a resource constrained world, over-consumption by some reduces the chances of other current humans, other species and future generations satisfying basic needs. Furthermore, many heterodox economist and

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<sup>23</sup> Basic needs refers to both material or physiological needs and non-material or psycho-social needs.

others directly or indirectly are pointing to the evidence that above a certain level, consumption of material goods do not add to wellbeing (Lintott, 1998; Daly, 2005; Costanza et al., 2006; Jackson, 2010). Equity here therefore refers to the maintenance of minimum and maximum levels of material consumption, such that all are able to meet their basic needs.

The norm of efficiency draws on authors such as Power (2006), Manno (2000) and Van Staveren (2003) who redefine the neoclassical notion of efficiency as maximising output from a given amount of input to minimising inputs for a given level of wellbeing. Efficiency places responsibilities both on producers to minimise resource inputs into production, and on consumers to seek satisfaction of their needs via lower resource use.

Finally in one respect deliberation refers to as John and James (2016) contend being able to use ‘interactions with others as the key source of enriching our own incredibly limited perspectives’ (no pg). Social life requires negotiating about the rules governing social interaction, for which deliberation is vital if rules are to be seen as genuinely legitimate. Given that diversity is a vital component of all life, including provide increased capacity for adaptation, deliberation is needed to then manage the consequences of diversity. Conflict arising from difference is a major consequence of diversity, and the possibility of the oppression of some groups by others. Deliberation is an important tool to reduce the problems that arise from diversity.

The next section briefly discusses how certain versions of communities are uniquely structured to foster sustainability norms, and more generally to help progression towards sustainable wellbeing.

### Sustainability and community

There are two main reasons for linking community and sustainability. The first is that it is communities who can most efficiently and who are the most motivated to meet socioeconomic needs as opposed to provisioning by the market and/or state. It is families and communities that most experience the negative feedback from a failure to meet socioeconomic needs. The second related factor is that communities can more effectively foster sustainability norms than the market and/or state. In one respect this is due to the lower transaction costs involved in

the social sanctioning of norms by communities compared to sanctioning via the use of formal agreements. Communities by definition largely do not have to use contracts to mediate beneficial exchange, which are costly in themselves, but also are subject to 'incompleteness' (Rao, 2003). The latter refers to the fact that contracts can never cover all contingencies, contributing to the resource intensive nature of using contractual (balanced or market) exchange (Rao, 2003).

One difference between the fostering of social norms via communities and the external means of achieving norm compliance is that often the norms communities seek to enforce may be perceived as more or less compatible with the interests of individual's within the community. In contrast more formal norms arising via the markets and/or the state may have less likelihood of being seen as in the interests of individuals, and hence may be resisted to a greater degree. Families and communities rely on authority, but as Carlson (1995) notes, it is 'natural authority tempered by affection' (pg 71).

A distinction is firstly made between 'real' or 'true' community and pseudo-community<sup>24</sup> (Bimber, 1998). 'Real' community is defined as a place-based group of people who firstly sanction each other, secondly endeavour to meet some level of each other's socioeconomic needs, such as a minimum of provision of social support, and thirdly largely use generalised reciprocity to facilitate mutual exchange. Communities are strong or 'real' communities the more they fulfil these roles. Note however that real communities will hereon however mainly just be referred to as community.

Pseudo-communities involve a more shallow level of connections between people living in the same place, but in particular they involve very limited mutual exchange and hence minimal locally based meeting of socioeconomic needs (Bimber, 1998). As Peck (1988) notes, pseudo-community are not committed enough to build community and therefore to address conflict, by reconciling self and other interest. Similarly Lane and Dorfman (1997) state that in pseudo-communities, norms of conflict aversion predominate, whereby relationships are such that community members avoid the risk of offending others and disturbing the status quo. They point to one result being a reduction of productive dialogue and

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<sup>24</sup> Other analogous terms are thick and thin community, for example see Bimber (1998).



debate. Social disorganisation theory<sup>25</sup> provides some insight into why communities may be pseudo-communities rather than true communities. Kubrin and Weitzer (2003) notes that poverty, residential mobility, ethnic diversity, and a lack of social networks reduce community capacity to control the behaviour of its members, that is, there is a lack of capacity to monitor and enforce norms.

A group of people living in one place are initially a ‘circumstantial community’ who have not deliberately chosen to live together in relatively close proximity, as opposed to an ‘intentional community’ of people who do choose to live more or less together (Questenberry, 1996). To become real communities, circumstantial communities must overcome the extent to which a natural affinity is absent between residents. Having a purpose for interaction is a significant means of converting circumstantial communities into real communities. Community socioeconomic initiatives are a means of providing this purpose, given their purpose of the satisfaction of socioeconomic needs.

### Dissertation structure

The structure of this dissertation is as follows. The next chapter reviews the literature on the concepts of sustainability, exchange and social norms preparatory to a discussion in chapter three of the concept of community and community socioeconomic initiatives. Chapter three also discusses the conceptual framework guiding the research. Chapter four discusses the methodology and methods by which the research was conducted. Chapter five introduces the first case study of Community Supported Agriculture, and applies the framework to analyse its potential to foster sustainability norms. Chapter six applies the framework to the second case study of Local Exchange Trading Systems. The seventh chapter undertakes a comparative analysis of the two case studies. Chapter eight provides the conclusions of the research, discusses the limitations and provides suggestions for further research.

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<sup>25</sup> Social disorganisation theory arises from research into crime and delinquency prevention.

## 2. Sustainability, exchange, and the role of norms

### Introduction

Chapter one indicated that a major challenge for sustainability is to address interdependence, or in other words address the conflict between self-interest and other interest to allow the maintaining of social order. This must be achieved before addressing a second major challenge of reducing the impact of human activity on the environment. It introduced the four main concepts underlying this research of sustainability, norms, exchange and community. This chapter firstly provides a literature review of sustainability, as a means of developing an approach that balances realistic assessments of current norms, with idealised visions of how norms could be changed. While sustainability can ultimately be seen to be the study of human survival and thriving, the discourse on sustainability attends to the details of the requirements of, and how best to progress towards, human survival and thriving both for current and for future generations.<sup>26</sup> This chapter then highlights norms as crucial for sustainability, since it is what we agree on as acceptable behaviour likely to promote surviving and thriving that is crucial for sustainability. In the final section, those non-negotiable norms vital for sustainability are identified.

This section aims to provide a brief summary of the main ways sustainability has been conceptualised in the literature. To assist with this aim, firstly a brief history of the concept is given. Then three categories are used to organise the literature as just one possible way of understanding the different views of the extent to which we are now faced with a 'sustainability crisis'. The huge variety of different conceptions of sustainability are classified into three basic categories of mainstream, radical, and moderate approaches. Within each category a number of elements are considered, including underlying theoretical frameworks, perceived extent of crises, relationships between nature and humans, inter-personal relationships, assumptions about human nature and recommendations for policy. However it should be noted that firstly this dissertation does not aim to provide a

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<sup>26</sup> This may be classified as an overly anthropocentric approach, but the underlying view is that all forms of life are important, not just human life. As Ikerd (1997) contends, 'enlightened anthropocentricity embraces ecocentricity'.

thorough review of all the sustainability literature, secondly that there is considerable overlap between the categories, and thirdly that additional work is needed to further clarify each position.

### History of sustainability

Daly (2005) notes one of the early areas of work contributing to the modern concern with sustainability in 1848 was from John Stuart Mill's writing 'Of the Stationary State'. However it was in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that concern began to be expressed by a broader range of authors. The precursors to increased environmental concern included the Club of Rome report of the Limits to Growth by Meadows et al. (1972), who stated that limits to the earth's carrying capacity means there are strict limits to material growth. The report was very prescient, highlighting a number of issues which have still largely not penetrated into mainstream politics. These include a warning about over-optimism in relation to the capacity of technology to solve problems of environmental degradation, and the slow change of political and social institutions relative to technological change. Also in 1972, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment was held; other major milestones included the publishing of the Brundtland report 'Our Common Future' in 1987. The latter generated one of the most commonly cited interpretations of sustainability as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (Šlaus and Jacobs, 2011). More recently, Waas et al. (2011) highlight a change in the development discourse from a focus on economic growth in the 1950s and 60s, to a social reaction to poverty levels by the early 1970s. They note the third area of interest developed by the 1980s was of environmental protection.<sup>27</sup> Waas et al. (2011) conclude that in less than 50 years the term sustainable development, with its concern about impacts of economic development on people and the planet, has become a bipartisan politically endorsed development model.

According to Koroneos and Rokos (2012) however, the actual term sustainability was first used in 1980 by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and

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<sup>27</sup>Although Foster (2012) notes the earlier contribution of the development of ecological theory in the 1960s and early 1970s.

Natural Resources (IUCN). They note further that the 1992 'Rio Earth Summit' in Brazil facilitated formal endorsement of the concept of sustainable development by over 150 national governments. It also generated specific policy initiatives such as 'Agenda 21' which is of particular relevance for this research, since it focuses on sustainable development at the local level.

The idea of three pillars being the basis of sustainability is attributed by Lehtonen (2004) indirectly to the Brundtland report. He notes that since the previously mentioned Rio summit, the tripartite concept solidified as the basis of sustainable development. Drawing on neoinstitutionalism and ecological economics, Soderbuam (2007) then identifies a trend of replacing the three pillars with three concentric circles. The environment comprises the outer-most circle, next is the social sphere, and the economic sphere comprises the innermost circle. The rationale is that economic activities should be in the service of all people while preserving ecosystems as the ultimate goal.

One final discourse relevant to the history of sustainability thought relates to the 'steady state' economy and the related degrowth discourse. The work of Georgescu-Roegen (1975) contributed substantially to the move away from productivism, including concepts such as the 'fallacy of endless substitution'. He noted the process of transforming stocks of highly concentrated and easily available resources into products and waste increases material degradation by increasing its entropy. Infinite growth is therefore not possible, leading to the desirability of a 'steady state economy'. Daly (2009) emphasises the aim of a steady state economy is to maintain a sufficient level of 'real wealth' indefinitely, avoiding both exponential growth and negative growth.

More recently the 'degrowth' movement has built a large body of work highlighting the problems of ongoing economic growth (Klitgaard, 2013). The degrowth discourse is noteworthy in addition for its explicit highlighting of increased quality of life resulting in part from the realisation of the limits of ever increasing material accumulation on human wellbeing. According to Andreonia and Galmarini (2013), the degrowth discourse focuses on 'the quantitative reduction of production and consumption and the qualitative aspects that increases human well-being' (p 65). The degrowth literature therefore makes a very important

contribution to the task of gaining commitment to sustainability, in making the case that progress towards sustainability can increase quality of life, in opposition to claims that decreased quality of life will be the inevitable result. The next two sections discuss how the major sustainability challenge has changed over the course of human history.

### The outdated sustainability challenge as a struggle for subsistence

Keynes (1933) contended in 1930 that throughout human history, the struggle for material subsistence has been the primary and most pressing problem for humanity, indeed all organisms share this compelling problem. This is in accordance with the evidence<sup>28</sup> that a focus on economic growth (that is, maximising supply of goods and services), has become firmly established as the dominant target of collective action.<sup>29</sup> Keynes notes that this struggle has and still does deeply influence the human condition. Therefore the extent to which the ‘economic problem’ may largely be solved, that is of reaching a level of production to globally satisfy all material needs, implies an existential crisis of meaning, pointing to the need for an equally compelling goal to replace it.<sup>30</sup> In essence the paradigm guiding humanity has become outdated.

In part the discourse on how it has become outdated due to the possibility of global material sufficiency is indicated by Heilbroner (in Chernomas, 1984) where he states:

the introduction of technology has one last effect whose ultimate implications for the metamorphosis of capitalism are perhaps greatest of all. This is the effect of technology in steadily raising the average level of well-being; thereby gradually bringing to an end the condition of material need as an effective stimulus for human behavior (p 1024).

The amount of waste produced in modern societies in turn is one indicator of globally reaching the point of material sufficiency. For example Royle (2016) states

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<sup>28</sup> For example see Beckert and Streeck (2008).

<sup>29</sup> Chapter two will note however of simultaneous alternative worldviews and/or approaches, such as the concept of ‘eudaimonia’ promoted by Aristotle, based on the concept of ‘the good life’, or human flourishing (see Ostasiewicz and Ostasiewicz 2015). Likewise it is noted that there are many other targets of collective action, for example as seen in social movements aimed at addressing oppression and other forms of disadvantage.

<sup>30</sup> The corollary is that those in power, who control decision making, will resist addressing the inequality that has been used as the rationale for maximising economic growth to address the struggle for subsistence.

that the current 2.9 trillion pounds of wasted food would feed the 800 million people who currently suffer from hunger twice over.

Global material sufficiency is an important element of 'post-normality', which has been described as one defining theme of the current era. Sardar (2010) points to post-normality as a transitory period where the old paradigms are dying, replacements are only just starting to emerge, and chaos, complexity and contradictions are common experiences.

### The new sustainable wellbeing challenge

There is a significant amount of literature from a range of disciplines that points to the emergence of wellbeing or quality of life as a replacement paradigm for the failed growth economy. Conceptualisations of the best direction of human endeavour towards flourishing and wellbeing have existed since at least Aristotle. Ostasiewicz and Ostasiewicz (2015) for example note that Aristotelian political economics focused on human flourishing, or 'the good life'. For these authors, the main goal of humanity is 'the development of a desirable way of living and sustaining the quality of life, also for future generations' (Ostasiewicz and Ostasiewicz, 2015, p 137). While to date this 'desirable way of living' has been focused on material security, accompanied by the assumption of neo-classical economics that material consumption is the sole source of well-being, the impossibility of ever increasing growth by itself highlights the imperative for a paradigm change.

Much more recently Sen (in Deneulin and McGregor, 2009) proposed a concept of 'wellbeing freedom' where all people should have the opportunity to achieve what they value. This opportunity then becomes both the ends and means of development, rather than development being focused on increasing material wealth as an end of development.

A significant array of other authors have pointed to the emergence of a new 'wellbeing' paradigm (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005; Stutz, 2006; Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009; Costanza, 2013). Definitions of wellbeing tend to focus on the level that human needs are met, and the satisfaction that individuals have with this level (Costanza et al. 2006). Costanza (2013) states that

a fair distribution (equity) and an efficient allocation of resources (efficiency) is required for the 'new world economy', based on sustainable wellbeing.

Eckersley (2005) provides yet another area of work contributing to the concept of sustainable wellbeing. He notes that both the OECD and the World Bank now recognise the imperative of placing more emphasis on the quality of growth. Eckersley states that the fundamental issue is not whether policies should be pro-growth or anti-growth<sup>31</sup>, rather growth should be seen as a means not an end, where quality of life is the end of socioeconomic development. For Eckersley (2005), quality of life can be defined as 'the opportunity to experience the social, economic, cultural and environmental conditions that are conducive to total wellbeing - physical, mental, social, spiritual' (p 5). Ormel (1999) identifies two components of wellbeing in terms of physical (material) wellbeing, and social wellbeing, and contends that wellbeing is the 'central goal of human activity.

Verstegen and Hanekamp (2005) note that redefining progress is a current imperative, given the limits of growth. They explicitly identify quality of life as providing 'an alternative way of growing', possibly satisfying the 'strong urge to grow' of many societies. Other authors from ecological economics and the degrowth discourse are a particularly fertile source of debates regarding the idea that sustainability is most usefully seen as relating to human wellbeing, and further as equitable and efficient wellbeing. (Costanza 2006; Schneider 2010).

A fundamental element of sustainable wellbeing is exchange based on generalised reciprocity, as the foundation of positive social relationships. Bruni (2008) for example notes the connection between sociality and subjective wellbeing. Likewise Johnson (2009) points to a recurring emphasis of wellbeing being concerned with 'relationships of family, friends and community' (p 9). Conversely, many who fail to maintain a level of positive relationships with others suffer from poor mental health (Leary, 2005), compromising opportunities to satisfy socioeconomic needs.

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<sup>31</sup> Van den Bergh (2010) argues that rather than 'degrowth', 'agrowth' is a more appropriate societal goal.

As will be discussed in the next section however, mainstream approaches to sustainability are still focused on the increasingly outdated paradigm of the goal of ever increasing economic growth.

### Mainstream sustainability

Neoclassical economics tends to be the main discipline that is used to frame the arguments for a mainstream sustainability approach. It focuses on a utilitarian approach where utility is assumed to increase with ever-increasing economic growth (Beck and Walker, 2013). The mainstream approach is based on conceptions of 'weak sustainability'. As O'Neill (2012) states, weak sustainability contends that particularly physical capital can be substituted for natural capital, hence the depletion of natural resources is considered acceptable. The overriding commitment rather is to economic growth, which purportedly is not only the superior means of meeting all human needs, but the only way to satisfy them (Eckersley, 2005).

The assumption is that if enough economic growth occurs, the benefits will trickle down to all (Daly 2005). In the mainstream view of sustainability, inequity is normalised as the price that must be paid in the short term to achieve enough economic growth so that all may accumulate material wealth (Angle 1976). The assumption is that to motivate people to work hard enough to maximise economic growth, greater material rewards must be given for greater productivity. If people are given access to resources when they haven't specifically contributed in return, the assumption here is that negative exchange will become excessive (Belousek, 2010).

The commitment to economic growth means that this approach tends to adopt the view that environmental problems are over-exaggerated. 'Climate sceptics'<sup>32</sup> tend to influence this view, including those within the political arena (Carter et al., 2011). Likewise possible links to inequality and socio-economic problems are downplayed or often ignored (Garcia, 2010). The mainstream approach assumes that current political-economic systems are well suited to the current challenges;

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<sup>32</sup> Climate sceptics tend to believe that climate change is a natural process rather than contributed to by humans.



in any case it is generally assumed that 'there is no alternative' (Langley and Mellor, 2002).

The mainstream position is based on the neoclassical assumption of economic rationality as intrinsic to human nature. On the other hand it also assumes that self-interest itself is bounded, that humans are not susceptible to self-interest becoming inflated to the level of threatening social order. Adam Smith (in Evensky, 2005) in particular maintained that morality would be strong enough to keep self-interest in check. This highlights a major assumption of this dissertation that 'morality' which can be seen to be closely connected to generalised reciprocity, is necessary for economic relationships. Since contracts are always 'incomplete' in that it is impossible and costly to try and include all possible contingencies (Rao, 2003), a willingness to extend goodwill is required for all the elements that arise from exchange that are not covered within a particular contract.

For Mayer (2001), the mainstream approach is based on the idea of guardianship, on which authoritarian rule is based. He notes the justification for guardianship relates to the 'principle of unequal competence' (p 147). The 'guardians' are those who, because of superior knowledge and virtue, legitimately should make most of the decisions, since 'non-guardians' are not capable of competent decision making. Guardians should act for the community, 'entrusted with all power but using it in a paternalist manner for the common good that only they can perceive' (Mayer, 2001: p 148). In turn guardians are perceived as more or less legitimately receiving large material rewards both to compensate for their increased responsibility, and to motivate the 'best' people to perform leadership roles. This position legitimates inequality as purportedly necessary for the benefit of all. Mainstream conceptions of sustainability assume that rule making is best dominated by those with authority and special expertise.

Since the mainstream position has an unwavering belief in economic growth as the solution to all societal ills, including poverty (Eckersley, 2005), it invests its faith in technology to not only drive economic growth but also to assist with other problems such as the energy problem, the waste problem, the pollution problem and the carbon emissions problem (Bailey and Wilson, 2009). The commitment to

economic growth is in part justified by the supposed 'Kuznets curve effect', where it is claimed that deterioration in the environment can be solved as incomes increase, due to people's greater capacity to invest in the environment (Rees, 2010). Consumption habits do not need to be changed in this view; indeed increasing consumption is considered important since greater levels of consumption are important for economic growth. In short, the mainstream position is motivated by the desire for the status quo to be preserved with regards to the distribution of resources (Julian, 2004).

The mainstream approach of unwavering commitment to economic growth has in recent times however begun to incorporate recognition that environmental problems (and social problems) are a threat to growth. The term ecological modernisation is a response to this threat. Rees (2010) notes that this position assumes that 'the problem can be solved through greater material and economic efficiency and technological 'fixes' (p 13), and therefore that economic growth can safely remain the focus of human endeavour. Blühdorn and Welsh (2007) also note that this position ignores the evidence that, to date, these strategies have actually increased adverse environmental impacts, known as the Jevons or rebound effect. As Vlek and Steg (2007) note, this refers to a possible intensification of an activity when the per-unit environmental resource use decreases (also see Manno, 2000). Unless limits are placed on consumption, increasing efficiency may merely lead to increased consumption.

Rees (2010) notes that a plethora of initiatives under the banner of ecological modernisation has arisen such as 'green building;' codes, 'new urbanism,' 'smart growth,' 'green consumerism' and so on. For Rees this merely gives the illusion of progress without having much effect on the underlying problems. These display an unfounded belief in the capacity of technology to solve environmental problems. The accompanying assumption is that market instruments such as carbon pricing will solve the problem. Bailey and Wilson (2009) for example note the emergence of the carbon economy based on markets for greenhouse gas emissions, which is claimed to have the capacity to reduce emissions in an economically efficient manner.

Therefore the mainstream approach focuses on economic sustainability, while playing down the importance of social and ecological sustainability. It includes the view that indeed economic sustainability is compromised by diverting resources from maintaining functioning social and ecological systems away from focusing on ever increasing economic growth. This is a fundamental flaw in the mainstream approach, the failure to fully recognise the impossibility of attending to economic sustainability without sufficiently maintaining functioning social and ecological systems. Two of the many contributions which highlight the problem of capitalism undermining the basis of its existence are Habermas's (1984) thesis of colonisation of the lifeworld, and Hirschmans (1982) self-destruction thesis. The view discussed next is a radical critique of the mainstream approach to sustainability.

### Radical sustainability

The term radical can be interpreted in at least two different ways. The first refers to root causes, hence a radical view on this basis would identify the ultimate causes of unsustainability norms, in other words of why people behave in ways not conducive to the equitable and efficient satisfying of socioeconomic needs. The second refers to 'far-reaching', in terms of drastic political, economic, or social fundamental changes. The following analysis includes elements of both meanings of the term. Within the radical sustainability discourse there tends to be a focus on areas such as political ecology, social ecology, ecological economics and radical political economy on the one hand, and biophysical sciences, in particular earth science (also known as geoscience) (for example see Steffen et al. 2011) on the other hand.

An important contribution of the radical view explicit in some of the sustainability literature is to highlight the severity of current multiple socio-economic and ecological crises. While there is much uncertainty about the future trends of particularly environmental problems, there is consensus in the radical view of the need for urgent action (Flannery, 2009).

As discussed, a discourse on 'degrowth' has emerged within ecological economics which is based on a radical critique of the capitalist political-economic system, for adverse effects on socio-economic and ecological sustainability (Fotopoulos, 2007). For example, property rights are posed as facilitating damaging exploitation of

land and labour (Schneider, 2012), capital dominance over labour as amounting to a fundamental antagonism that can never be resolved without radical change (Fuchs, 2004), and interest-bearing debt-based money is proposed as creating an imperative for growth in a biophysically limited world (Greco, 2009).

Building on the latter point, mounting debt and financial speculation are identified as further symptoms of current serious problems (Polack, 2004), and as signs that the neoliberal capitalist system itself has fatal fundamental flaws. Another area of debate critiques the tendency for 'power to corrupt' and hence the state, to the extent it monopolises formal power, as failing to prioritise the needs of all citizens (Long and Machan, 2008).

Klitgaard (2010) contends that a growth crisis consisting of three sets of limits reflects the terminal nature of capitalism. First is an economic limit, whereby late capitalism is increasingly failing to provide either sufficient economic growth or employment. The second is a biophysical limit, where in any case indefinite growth cannot occur on a finite planet. Thirdly political limits exist since political legitimacy depends on maintaining economic growth and employment. Capitalism needs economic growth, but according to Klitgaard (2010), due to internal contradictions, the age of economic growth is ending. Both secular (non-cyclical) stagnation and secular unemployment are the new reality. Other work supporting this theory is offered by more conservative sources, such as Eggertson and Mehrota (2014) and Summers (2013).

With regards to relationships between humans and nature, often the radical view incorporates an ecocentric as opposed to an anthropocentric view, which contends that other species have intrinsic value in that they have a right to exist unrelated to their instrumental value to humans (Barry, 2002). There is a third biocentric view whereby humans are deemed of the same value as any other animal, which Bookchin (in Dobson, 1995) criticises as failing to acknowledge extraordinary human attributes compared to other animals. The debate on earth stewardship rests on 'higher' human capacities relative to other animals, while mindful that these capacities have also brought us to the point of undermining the socioecological systems on which human life depends.

Reducing inequality is a major element of the radical view, depicted as necessary for sustainable wellbeing. Policy reforms to this end include minimum and maximum incomes (Blauwhof, 2012), basic guaranteed income policies (Lucarelli and Fumagalli, 2008), and radical financial reform (Schneider et al., 2010). These tend however to be currently politically unacceptable, particularly to the extent as Klitgaard (2010) notes of resistance to any redistribution from the wealthy to the poor.

There is a substantial body of work advocating more basic structural reform in terms of concepts such as deliberative democracy, direct democracy, and participative democracy (Carpini, 2004). These are part of a broader call for fundamental system transformation such as expressed in socialist, social ecology and communitarian discourses. In a broader sense, some forms of radicalism advocate revolution as the necessary answer to the extent of change needed, for example Wright (2009) notes a call by some for a 'revolutionary rupture with capitalism'.

Ultimately however the radical approach to sustainability arguably most commonly advocates locally based solutions. In one respect this is based on Wright's (2009) concept of interstitial transformation, which seeks:

to build new forms of social empowerment in the niches, spaces and margins of capitalist society, often where they do not seem to pose any immediate threat to dominant classes and elites. This is the strategy of building institutions of social empowerment that is most deeply embedded in civil society and often falls below the radar screen of radical critics of capitalism (p 211)

Various forms of organisation such as libertarian municipalism (Biehl, 1998), participatory economics (Albert and Hahnel, 1991), and different conceptions of community-based economics (Cameron and Gibson, 2005; Hahnel, 2005) are advocated as having significant potential to address sustainability concerns. There is indeed emerging both a vibrant literature and action towards local initiatives (Goldsmith and Mander, 2001), with varying degrees of predicted capacity however to institute change (McMichael, 2007).

Therefore to summarise this brief literature review of a radical approach to sustainability, it highlights the severity of environmental crises such as climate change and of socio-economic problems. Two aspects of the latter are highlighted

in particular of inequality, and secondly the dominance of economic growth as a policy objective. A common thread is the identification of the necessity of transformation of political-economic systems to address unsustainability norms, rather than being based on techno-optimism. The final approach takes the middle ground between the mainstream and radical views.

### Moderate sustainability

The moderate view of sustainability can be seen to draw on disciplines such as economics, socioeconomics, business, law and social psychology. While still being influenced by disciplines such as political ecology and biophysical sciences, it also attempts to understand the mainstream sustainability view, given that this is the view that currently predominates in a socio-political sense. The moderate view as developed in this dissertation accepts many of the concerns of the radical view with respect to the severity of ecological and socio-economic problems. However it advocates a ‘toning down’ of communication about these problems, due to doubt about the effectiveness of emphasising possible imminent catastrophe (McKenzie-Mohr, 2000).<sup>33</sup> The moderate approach takes account of the contention that hope and meaning are basic human needs, such that constant messages about increasing crises can undermine public confidence, and increase uncertainty. This can exacerbate tendencies for a retreat into self-interested behaviours (Kessler and Daase, 2008). McGeer (2004) confirms the dangers of messages of imminent catastrophe promoting a lack of hope in stating:

To be a full-blown intentional agent—to be a creature with a rich profile of intentional and emotional states and capacities—is to be an agent that hopes, to be, in the words of Thomas Aquinas, an agent that characteristically directs mental energy toward future goods that are ‘hard but not impossible to obtain’. This view has strong implications: for instance, that hope—or hoping—is not an option for us as (cognitively competent) human beings (p 101).

The next element of the moderate view recognises a wide disparity between the extent to which different people relate to nature. Crucially the moderate view accepts that ‘it’s hard to be green when you are in the red’, in other words economic disadvantage can be a barrier to investment in environmental care

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<sup>33</sup> The importance of sustainability leadership is highlighted in the moderate view whereby leaders are aware of the seriousness of socioecological crises, but balance the broader population’s (lack of) capacities to constructively respond to the crises.

(Cocklin et al., 2006). In relation to other basic needs (whereby contact with nature is assumed to be a basic need), the moderate view highlights the basic human need for positive social relations (Baumeister et al., 2000), including hierarchical relationships.

Fiske (1992) identifies hierarchical relationships as a fully legitimate and necessary form of social relationship. This supports Wright's (2009) identification of symbiotic transformation, where horizontal and vertical collaboration is vital. This approach sees some form of deliberative democracy <sup>34</sup> as having potential to balance broad participation with accountability (Fung and Wright, 2001). More generally the moderate approach contends that capitalism needs substantial regulation to achieve sustainability. Financial regulation (Rudd, 2009) and employment regulation (McMichael, 1999) are two such areas of change advocated for in the literature.

The moderate view does recognise the signs of the increasing failure of the paradigm of economic growth as a sufficient means of guiding collective and individual human endeavour. These signs are reflected in the thesis of Klitgaard (2010) of trends of secular stagnation and secular unemployment. Automation replacing labour adds to the thesis of the failed growth economy, including scepticism about the capacity of technology to drive the creation of replacement levels of employment (Dorini, 1996). In addition, the pressure for austerity, particularly in Europe, is one sign of a change in conditions that appear to reflect a 'new ball game', not just a short term case of economic recession (Peet, 2011). These discourses all support the view of fatal contradictions of the capitalist model increasingly becoming part of the moderate approach, due to increasing difficulties in ignoring the problems generated by persisting with the outdated economic growth paradigm.<sup>35</sup>

Environmental, including resource scarcity crises are also part of the moderate view. Homer-Dixon (in Barry, 2012) for example identifies five interrelated 'tectonic stresses' of population stress, energy stress, environmental stress,

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<sup>34</sup>Sociocracy is another alternative form of participative rule with merit, defined by Price (n.d.) as decision-making by people 'that regularly interact with each other and have a common aim' (no pg).

<sup>35</sup>It is outside the scope of the dissertation to investigate further these claims, but just some of the substantial numbers of relevant references include O'Connor (1993) and Moore (2010).

climate stress and (socio) economic stress (including increasing inequality). He notes the danger of 'synchronous failure' in terms of a convergence of these stresses, also noting a common response of on the one hand denial, and/or on the other hand attempts to manage these problems while ignoring the underlying causes. Of these stresses, climate stress looms large as a justification for radical change, with major impacts predicted from extreme weather events (Hansen et al., 1988). Likewise 'peak oil' and 'declining energy return on investment' (Murphy and Hall, 2011) whereby economic growth has been dependent on relatively cheap supplies of energy is another trend highlighted by the radical version of sustainability.

One particular area of concern as Steffen et al. (2011) note, relates to food security for the estimated 9 billion people predicted to occupy the planet by 2050. The moderate view highlights the extent to which the human footprint is challenging earth's carrying capacity. In a survey of 65 different estimates of the carrying capacity of earth, the majority concluded that a maximum of 8 billion people is the limit that the earth can support (UGEAS, 2012).<sup>36</sup> The consequence of exceeding earth's carrying capacity is related to 'tipping points' (Clark, 2007), where exceeding certain thresholds may trigger irreversible changes in ecosystems.

There are substantial variations in the interpretations of the consequences of these trends. Steffen et al. (2011) for example, recognise that human activity now adversely affects planetary functioning to such an extent that it warrants calling the current era the 'Anthropocene'. The corollary is of the need for earth stewardship, where Chapin et al. (2011) suggest that an 'informed and interactive community' has in the past and can again in the future manage common resources by institutional design.

There tend to be two somewhat contradictory positions on human nature within the moderate discourse on sustainability. The first involves a pessimistic view that human nature is 'inherently unsustainable', vulnerable to extreme selfishness and the seeking of domination of humans over nature, and of each other. For example Rees (2010) states that:

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<sup>36</sup> The estimates ranges from less than 2 billion (involving 6 studies) to 1,024 billion (1 study).



My working hypothesis is that modern *H. sapiens* is unsustainable by nature—unsustainability is an inevitable emergent property of the systemic interaction between contemporary techno-industrial society and the ecosphere. I trace this conundrum to humanity's once-adaptive, sub-conscious, genetic predisposition to expand (shared with all other species), a tendency reinforced by the socially constructed economic narrative of continuous material growth. Unfortunately, these qualities have become maladaptive (p 13).

Other authors such as Therborn (2013) are highly critical of the related trend of inequality, identifying this as contributing to our current problems. In contradiction to this view however is Kropotkin's (1902) identification of cooperation rather than competition as the dominant human predisposition. This has been criticised by many as an 'over-socialised' view (Dobbin, 2004), reflecting a concern of a swing too far in the other direction from the neoclassical view of asociality. This is reflected in a naive and romantic view of preindustrial human nature by some, such as the myth of 'noble savage' (Buss, 2001). Many who subscribe to some versions of anarchist thought may likewise over-emphasise the human capacity for self-regulation (Cock, 1995).

More broadly, the moderate view concurs with Wright's (2009) advocacy for 'positive class compromise', whereby communities achieve empowerment while at the same time assisting elites with problems they cannot solve themselves. He notes that where social empowerment radically threatens elites, such gains will always be 'precarious and vulnerable to counterattack', and therefore will tend to be reversed due to difficulties in challenging the status quo. In contrast if social empowerment simultaneously addresses important interests of elites, they are more likely to be promoted, or at least less resisted.

Like the radical view, local solutions feature in many versions of the moderate view. Krueger and Agyeman (2005) for example highlight the potential of local policies and practices, and Kates (2000) notes that at the local scale, complexity is more manageable. In part localisation is advocated due to the energy problem and tackling climate change. For example, Hopkins (2010) states localised production and consumption is virtually inevitable due to declining energy availability.

Somewhat moderate ideas of 'agrowth', or steady state economics also include a discourse of localisation. Agrowth is a modification of degrowth, recognising that some level of growth may still be needed, at least as long as populations are still

increasing in many parts of the world (Van den Bergh, 2010), and given possible realistic limits to redistribution. The debate is rather about the quality of growth (Sachs, 1999), including addressing the considerable amount of waste that occurs in modern economies (Redclift, 1996).

Sachs (1999) highlights a difference between the radical and moderate view in stating that 'in the real world the strong definition of ... sustainability must be relaxed, except as the projection of an ideal future, providing the overall perspective for long-term societal planning' (p 33). He notes that in the real world trade offs are a given, whereby on the one hand some are unacceptable, but on the other hand others must be tolerated in the short term.

Finally the moderate view aligns with institutional economics and the concept of collective agreements. Johnson (2003) highlights the importance of collective agreements as the foundation of human co-existence and interdependence. Collective agreements cannot be reached, at least not easily (that is with a minimum of transaction costs) without individuals having some level of confidence that by supporting a particular agreement their interests will not be compromised. Johnson (2003) states that collective agreements are necessary to avert environmental catastrophes since sufficient numbers of individuals are not likely to reduce their consumption enough without a substantial degree of confidence that others will also restrain their consumption. Therefore he claims '[o]ur obligation is not fruitlessly to reduce individual use, but to support a collective agreement to reduce everyone's use to [a] ... sustainable level' (p 271). Johnson (2003) states that an effective collective agreement involves establishing rules for socioeconomic interaction, a mechanism for monitoring rule compliance and sanctions for non-compliance, and a means for adapting this whole process as conditions change. This process can be formal and/or informal, and in effect operates to reconcile self and other interest. The moderate view critiques the mainstream form of sustainability which has failed to generate any effective type of legitimated collective agreement that maintains functioning social, economic and ecological systems.

To summarise the moderate sustainability position, ultimately it tries to balance between making genuine progress towards sustainability and political

acceptability.<sup>37</sup> Most importantly it takes account of cognitive limitations - recognising that people can change but it does take time, and often will not occur until there are very compelling reasons to do so (McKenzie-Mohr and Smith, 1999). The next section will present comments from the semi-structured interviews conducted with key informants in relation to sustainability.

### Interviewee comments

Since sustainability is a main theme of this dissertation, the first task of this research was to explore different understandings of sustainability. Towards this aim, a range of mostly Australian academics, government representatives and community practitioners were interviewed for their perspectives on the most important aspects of sustainability. The interviewee's expressed a range of definitions of sustainability, gave differing ideas of the importance of scale, and of the biggest challenges to sustainability. However there was also a level of agreement on some points as will now be discussed. Firstly the most commonly given definition of sustainability was the Brundtland definition of meeting the needs of present without compromising the ability of those in the future to meet their needs. With regards to the question of who has responsibility for achieving sustainability, there was a mix of those contending that individuals and communities must take the lead, and others who highlighted governments, while many advocated a combination of both.

In concert with a moderate view of sustainability, one respondent identified the capacity of the concept of sustainability to unite individuals and groups, stating that with regards to sustainability:

the most compelling aspect is that it generates coalitions, it pulls together disparate concerns, different agendas, and different spatial scales... Climate change is bringing new people into the conversation, it involves lots of different agendas coming together (S6).

Again in line with the moderate view there was four comments related to the problem of economism:

The biggest threat to sustainability is ongoing growth without respecting the survivability of the key systems that support life (S7)

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<sup>37</sup>In particular taking account of a perceived current lack of capacity to effect radical change by individuals and institutions.

Sustainability requires using interest rather than capital - very few things are used sustainably (S11)

The whole concept has shifted from environmental sustainability to economic sustainability - it doesn't make sense to continually grow (S15)

We will be running out of resources on the planet, we are approaching limits (S4).

Another pointed indirectly to the concept of sustainability as wellbeing in stating:

The best definition I've found [of sustainability] and that sits well within myself is a system that allows future generations to be able to flourish. The biggest challenge to sustainability is to help people become aware that living sustainability is actually a really enjoyable thing to do, there is a lot of fear that living a sustainable life means going without, but the actual reality is you get to have more time for yourself, to be involved in projects that enable the whole of your humanity rather than quite a narrow motive like a profit motive or consumption motive, whatever it is, it is a very shallow use of us as humans. You get to express more of your humanity, your humanness. You get to have more time with your family, to embrace more of your intellectual capabilities, to be stimulated by how we use technology. With the current debate in mining, all the talk about the perceived loss of jobs, the reality is a lot of people will be employed in far more entertaining, enlivening jobs like in solar, hydro, which is far more exciting than being deep down in a hole pulling out black stuff. You only have to go to one of those mining towns to see the problem of fly in, fly out work, you can see they are overweight, they drink a lot, I would say that that is not a job, it is an existence (S4).

In a somewhat similar vein, R6 noted benefits to reducing emissions on health, for example in addressing obesity. Activities such as bike riding and walking which reduce car use and hence emissions, can increase physical health. With regards to the question of who the responsibility lies with for progressing sustainability, one respondent answered that it:

Has to lie with government, as government is the institution which is responsible for the welfare of society as a whole, the only institution with the authority to do the necessary things that need to be done. It is a big cop out, distractions like talking about responsibility by corporations and so on, but governments institute frameworks within which we must operate. Sustainability is not about what one person does, but is about what we all do together, so it's about social processes not individual processes, but in our individual society we don't focus on the social (S9).

In response to the same question another stated that:

All of us are responsible, but some have levers they can pull to have more influence and more impact, to ensure that sustainability happens. Some have more influence than others, so have more responsibility (S15).

Other respondents were sceptical about the potential of government to address sustainability, stating:

Governments can't help [with sustainability], they serve the rich, their top priority is keeping businesses going. They are only interested in growth. It [sustainability] has got to be across all levels but governments won't do anything. They are nervous about doing too much because they might lose their seat. Also people are not engaged in politics (S14).

The contention by many of the interviewees was that rather than the government taking the lead in progressing towards sustainability, many expressed a view of the importance of communities. For example one claimed that 'Individuals and community are taking the lead [with regard to sustainability]' (C19).

The following respondent was unequivocal about the need for community mobilisation, and highlighted the importance of a focus on local socioeconomic need satisfaction, stating that:

If sustainability is to happen it will be done by transitions towns, but hobbies are not productive... there is a need to focus on radical change. We need to organise productive enterprises, and replace government by neighbourhood governments. The strategies involve identifying and joining together unmet needs of the town and unused productive capacities. Research what is being imported and see what can be produced locally to replace them. We need to educate about the need to reduce consumption. Basically the household or community economy should be upheld as the centre of our lives and the main source of life satisfaction, more important than a career. The main problem of LETS is that people trade as individuals, which doesn't encourage collectivism. What's needed is cooperative firms that deal with the production of necessities (S17).

Two others stated that communities must work with government as part of coalition building (S12), and that one advantage of Transition Towns<sup>38</sup> (a community initiative that focuses on addressing climate change and 'peak oil') is that to the extent they are seen to add to converting cities into 'liveable cities', they can attract corporate and business support.

Another (S7) mentioned two specific collaborations between government and communities in the state of Victoria, one called 'Communities and Councils in transition', focused on reducing carbon emissions, and the other called 'Tiny Towns', where a number of small towns who don't have the resources to do much

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<sup>38</sup> See Hopkins (2008). Hopkins is the founder of the Transition Town movement.

themselves join with others to share knowledge and work together, these initiatives are growing rapidly across Victoria.

Respondent S12 noted that one driver of increased localisation will be that ‘[a]nything that involves transport will become much more expensive’.

More broadly and still in line with the moderate approach one respondent pointed to the need for technical research:

We need to do research that addresses the question of what are the necessary conditions for human population to live within the biophysical carrying capacity of the planet while not degrading conditions (S6).

Supporting the virtuous circle theory of change, one respondent noted a ‘sense of enthusiasm about informal support groups linking together’, whereby ‘you can do a hell of a lot better by working together’ and ‘to change values and dispositions, we need activities where we interact with others’ (S3). Another identified communities as sources for ‘new interaction’ and capable of facilitating deliberative democracy (S13). Furthermore ‘groups are growing in number, it’s all about networks, supporting people and being supported by them’ (S7). These all highlight the importance of interdependence and interaction at the community level.

In relation to positive change, one optimistic respondent expressed the following:

The world is changing, investors and philanthropists are opening up to support businesses to internalise social and environmental costs (S4).

When asked what is causing that change, the respondent replied that:

There is an awakening world starting to realise that we are reaching our limits - the fear factor is kicking in, we are starting to realise that unless we do something about it, we are going to be leaving our kids an impoverished world, or even ourselves we are starting to feel the impacts of financial problems and now resource constraints are becoming much more accepted as a reality...I think people want to become more connected to their environment and to their place.. the world has become homogenised so much that now people are wanting to return to their cultural identity, people are wanting to identify what is it about my area I can identify with - that leads to questions like what do I want to preserve.. At an individual level there is an awakening, and then there is a global awakening (S4)

This comment resonates with other work such as regarding ‘glocalisation’, whereby at the same time as globalising processes occurring, there is an element of increased desire to seek identity at the local level.

The comments highlighted both the role of government in ultimately needing to take the lead in sustainability, supported by business, as well as participating in coalitions with communities, with some comments providing a caution of current failure of the state to perform a vital leadership role. Overall however, the comments support the emphasis in the moderate view of sustainability on the necessity of collective agreements to drive collective action to promote large scale change.

There was support overall for the ‘top down and bottom up’ approach to sustainability, whereby both governments and communities have important roles to play. Identification of the approaching of limits was another theme of note. In general, the interviewees could be said to promote a moderate approach rather than mainstream or radical approach. An elaboration in terms of clarifying and building on the moderate approach is discussed next.

### Elaborating the moderate approach

One element of the moderate approach is the highlighting of a distinction between procedural and substantive sustainability. Robinson (in Miller, 2013) notes the usefulness of these two ways of defining sustainability. He firstly defines substantive sustainability as consisting of a reconciliation of the ecological imperative (staying within the earth's physical carrying capacity), an economic imperative (satisfying material needs)<sup>39</sup>, and a social imperative (to ‘provide systems of governance that propagate the values people want to live by’ (p 284)) (Miller, 2013). He then outlines the procedural definition as the ‘emergent property of a discussion about desired futures that’s informed by some understanding of the ecological, social, and economic consequences of different courses of action’ (p 284).

The emphasis here is on social learning, where for Meppem (2000) ‘[s]ustainability efforts should therefore be judged by the quality of process, the ability to build relations between stakeholders that reflect trust, and enhanced learning and understanding of different values and meanings [that inevitably occur]’ (p 57). In a similar vein Reed et al. (Groh and McFadden, 1997) point to the importance of social learning in managing social, economic and ecological systems. Two aspects

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<sup>39</sup> The production of surpluses and the distribution of those surpluses could be added here.

of social learning are collective self-reflection through interaction and dialogue, and learning how to collaborate. It incorporates ideas of 'triple loop learning', which involves questioning values, beliefs and worldviews, when assumptions inherent in existing dominant worldviews are no longer valid.

The procedural approach to progressing sustainability is in line with the post-normal imperative to take uncertainty and complexity into account (Funtowicz and Ravetz, 1993). Systems thinking can be seen as a vital concept for the procedural approach, in terms of recognising pervasive connections, of how different functions relate to each another, making use of diversity and creating synergies from that diversity, and creating and utilizing feedback loops (Wals and Schwarzin, 2012).

Other contributions to the procedural approach include Bluhdorn and Welsh (2007), who note the need for dialogue on what is to be sustained, for how long and so on, which is frequently obscured in political debates. In his discussion of discursive communities, Meppem (2000) supports the procedural approach of participative dialogue, in noting that:

[w]orking with sustainability means embracing ambiguity in dealing with an elusive and diverse array of societal values. Any attempt to define sustainability in a positive/normative sense neglects the complexity that sustainability implies. Rather, a more appropriate strategy would be to open out the debate between development and environmental integrity in particular contexts. Sustainability then becomes the pursuit of communicative praxis for collectively defining our development concerns (p 49).

A further contribution is provided by the recent literature on discursive institutionalism, which in part investigates the interactive and institutional aspects of discourse (Schmidt, 2008). Finally Norton (1999) notes that 'sustainable outcomes are not definable in advance, but must emerge from a program of active social experimentation and learning. Both ... are best understood as characterising evolving processes, rather than ideal outcomes' (p.461).

The moderate approach to sustainability developed here is based on the effectiveness of balancing both procedural and substantive approaches to sustainability. On the one hand, it is only by arriving at participatory, collective understandings of sustainability that real progress will be made in terms of the



generation of the 'will' or motivation to address the deep issues of human survival and thriving (Meppem, 2000). Therefore deliberation is identified as a vital sustainability norm. On the other hand we have sufficient knowledge now of some of the basic requirements for human survival and thriving (Costanza, 2013). Therefore we can move forward in progressing towards effective socioeconomic systems for maintaining the other sustainability norms of generalised reciprocity, equity, and efficiency.

With regards to the substantive approach, this dissertation identifies problems with both the radical and mainstream approaches, and hence builds on the moderate approach to establish a working definition and related parameters of sustainability. I firstly contend that the radical approach to sustainability on the one hand tends to imply that the message of possible imminent catastrophe ought to be broadcast far and wide, ignoring such factors as the imprecision of the forecasts of imminent catastrophe, and possibly adverse impacts on 'social moods' (Casti, 2010).<sup>40</sup> Jackson (2008) for example maintains that a radical discourse of the management of human 'greed' 'underestimates the complexity of human motivations and risks alienating those whose behavior it seeks to change' (p 20). Mainstream sustainability on the other hand often amounts to 'greenwashing' (Nelson, 2009) and 'redwashing' (Maillard, 2008), where businesses and governments may claim they genuinely attend to environmental and social concerns, but fail to do so in actuality.

One element both the radical and mainstream approaches have in common is their under-estimation of cognitive limitations. The moderate approach taken here recognises first and foremost cognitive limitations, identifying social sanctioning and collective action more generally as the means by which they can be addressed. To this end it focuses on symbiotic transformation (Wright, 2009), recognising that it is not just horizontal relationships that are important, vertical relationships also need attention. Beyond this initial focus, Gilbertson et al. (2014) note that sustainability can simply relate to being responsible with our resources, about not

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<sup>40</sup> Social mood is encapsulated in the concept of 'socioeconomics', based on the idea that social moods strongly influence the nature of collective action, related to the human impulse to herd in contexts of uncertainty (Casti, 2010).

using more than our share, in short, making sure ‘there is enough, for all, forever’ (p 4). They contend further that ‘sustainable practice needs to include a balance between ecological, economic and community needs, while allowing future generations to meet their needs’ (p. 4). Ultimately sustainable practices depend on norms, which are identified as crucial to ensuring the level of cooperative relationships required by our current challenges.

Specifically norms relating to exchange are identified as the initial priority for sustainability, as will now be discussed.

## Exchange

This dissertation is based on the assumption that mutual exchange is the core means of individuals cooperating together to achieve a greater standard of living and quality of life than they ever could achieve by themselves. Exchange can be seen to be the basic ingredient which ‘makes human [interdependent] life possible’ (Deneulin and McGregor, 2009). Likewise Befu (1977) contends that ‘exchange penetrates through the social fabric and may be thought of as a network holding society together’ (p 255). The corollary is that unless individuals perceive exchange is more or less in their interests, they will be reluctant to exchange. Therefore a perception of more or less equal exchange becomes important (Bruni 2008). Two theories relating to exchange are drawn on for this dissertation. The first is social exchange theory, the second is the theory of micro social order. Finally Sahlins (1972) delineation of three forms of exchange is identified as providing the multidimensional understanding of exchange governing socioeconomic relationships on which sustainable wellbeing depends.

A wide range of authors such as Blau (1964), Emerson (1976), Befu (1977), Kranton (1996), Molm and Takahashi (2001)<sup>41</sup> and Lawler et al. (2008) were drawn on to identify links between exchange and sustainability. More specifically, social exchange theory (SET) provided the core theory for understanding this link. For Molm et al., (2007) SET is based on the assumption that individuals are ‘dependent on one another for valued outcomes, that they are motivated to obtain more of

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<sup>41</sup> Molm and Takahashi (2001) point out that exchange partners vary in the value of the resources they control, and that these variations in value can have powerful effects on exchange patterns and power dynamics.

the outcomes that they value and others control, and that they engage in recurring exchanges, in which benefits received are contingent on benefits provided, to obtain those outcomes' (p 210). Molm et al. (2007) emphasise the fundamental mechanism of 'reciprocal exchange'. Integrating the literature on exchange with socioeconomics contributes to the concept of exchange as a process by which self and other interests can be balanced, and material and non-material needs met on an equitable basis. Etzioni (2003) highlights this reconciling of 'I' and 'We' as fundamental to socioeconomics.

The second theory relating to exchange relevant in particular to the concept of community socioeconomic initiatives, is Lawler et al.'s (2008) 'micro social order' theory. The work of Lawler et al. (2008) builds on social exchange theory, and the importance of reciprocity. To recap the significance of reciprocity, firstly both partners benefit materially by giving and receiving to satisfy economic needs, and secondly non-material needs are satisfied by positive social interaction. Lawler et al. contend that '[w]hen structures promote repeated interactions among the same individuals, people tend to form enduring relations or group affiliations' (p 519)<sup>42</sup>. Lawler et al. (2008) then infers that opportunities for reciprocity can be strengthened to the extent that individuals cooperate together on joint tasks, which secondly promote a sense of shared responsibility for the outcomes of the tasks. The loss of family and community functions (Popenoe, 2012) translates to a loss of opportunities for the creation of micro social orders via joint tasks.

Hence community socioeconomic initiatives, with their focus on social provisioning involving joint tasks and shared responsibility, can increase community capacity. Exchange therefore is a vital component of social life, but is a multidimensional concept. Sahlins (1972) identification firstly of two basic forms of exchange pinpoints the means by which cooperation occurs, of firstly benevolence between people (generalised exchange, in other words generalised reciprocity). The second form is balanced exchange, which occurs between people who do not have a pre-existing personal relationship, and therefore require extra assurance that the other party will contribute something of roughly equal value to an exchange.

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<sup>42</sup> This may relate to the 'mere exposure' theory that experiential learning can lead to changes based on positive interaction. See Buunk (1998).

I further divide balanced exchange into two further categories. The first is exchange mediated by state controlled money, and the second is exchange mediated by a community controlled 'money' or currency. One difference between them is that the former can transgress the norm of equal exchange, reducing opportunities for sustainable wellbeing, while the latter can complement generalised reciprocity in allowing increased beneficial exchange to occur. Since the Industrial Age, state controlled balanced exchange, also called market exchange has crowded out a level of generalised exchange (Block, 2007). Sahlins (1972) also identifies negative exchange as a third form of exchange, involving getting 'something for nothing'. This is the first unsustainability norm identified later in this chapter.

Highlighting that mutual exchange or reciprocity is vital for the satisfying of socioeconomic needs then identifies the concept of norms as an important topic. For a behaviour to become adopted by the majority of people, it must come to be seen as accepted by one's group. The following section will therefore outline the next step in the main argument of this dissertation that norms are crucial to addressing sustainability.

## Norms

This section gives a short review of the literature on norms. To begin the section, it is noted that the term 'norm' is used inter-changeably with 'social norms'. Since we are an interdependent species, being able to predict with some accuracy of how others will behave, and ideally being confident that they will behave with our interests in mind is fundamental to mutual exchange as a survival and thriving strategy. This is encapsulated by the term of trust, on which there is a voluminous range of literature indicating the importance of trust to socioeconomic development (both in a qualitative and quantitative sense), such as Algan and Cahuc (2013), Beckenkamp (2012), Gambetta (1988) and Möllering (2005).

It is not the intention to supply a comprehensive literature review of norms, however a range of academic work was analysed for the variety of ways it is used by researchers. The significance of the concept of norms is first highlighted by the understanding that norms refer to behaviours, and it is behaviours that are a vital

aspect of sustainability. Borrowing from Rousseau (in Birchfield, 1999), 'norms make actors, and actors generate norms' (p 32).

The most common three attributes of social norms mentioned in the literature are that firstly they commonly refer to behaviours, secondly as common or accepted behaviours and hence ensure a level of predictability required for social interaction, and thirdly that they are maintained by social sanctioning (Kacowicz, 2001). The latter provides one distinction between social norms and behaviours induced by external compliance, such as generated by legal means.

Authors who contribute identify these features of norms include Duffy et al (2013), who define norms as 'rules of behaviour that serve to coordinate interactions among individuals and specify sanctions for violators' (p 671). Likewise Kandori (1992) defines norms as 'desirable behaviour together with sanction rules in a community' (p 63). A fourth aspect was that norms are those behaviours commonly accepted only within a defined group (Cialdini and Trost, 2004). A crucial point is that norms facilitate social order by enabling and constraining behaviour to promote predictability and 'meaningfulness' in social life (Hargrave and Van De Ven, 2006). Since embeddedness in a group is crucial to successful social life, it is the behaviours that the group endorses that are important, which may not necessarily be the same behaviours that other groups promote as acceptable and sanction accordingly. This relates to Cannon et al. (2000) definition of norms as shared expectations regarding behaviour, necessary for cooperation to achieve mutual and individual goals.

There are some authors who highlight norms as arising from the need to solve problems of collective living. This is a more neoclassical interpretation, where norms tend to be commonly seen as always functional. In particular, a common comment about norms is that they function to solve problems of collective action, and thus only arise due to interdependence and the externalities that result from interdependence (Huck et al., 2012). However others such as Bicchieri and Muldoon (2012) note that norms are not always functional, particularly within 'sub-cultures', such as gangs and cults.

Many authors blur the distinction between institutions and norms, with some defining institutions as consisting of both social norms and legal norms (Francois

2008), while others restrict institutions to legal norms only (Cialdini and Trost 2004). Francois (2008) notes North's often quoted definition of institutions as 'the rules of the game, [of] formal laws, informal constraints, shared norms, beliefs and self-imposed limits on behavior and their enforcement characteristics; i.e., courts, police, etc.' (p 2). Similarly Beckenkamp (2012) defines institutions as 'fairly stable sets of commonly recognized formal and informal rules that constrain the behavior of individuals in social interactions' (p 2). Again norms facilitate social order by enabling and constraining behaviour to promote predictability and 'meaningfulness' in social life (Hargrave and Ven 2006). The overwhelming consensus however appears to be that both informal norms and formal institutions are required to maintain social order. As Francois (2008) notes, individuals do on occasions act to take account of other needs, but formal rules are needed to ensure that the large temptation to defect present in current society is counteracted. Möllering (2005) uses the concept of trust/control duality to note the necessary complementarity between social norms and legal norms.

Highlighting the interdisciplinary nature of the study of norms, Bicchieri and Muldoon (2012) note the differing ways norms have been studied within different disciplines. They note four areas in particular of sociology (the effect of norms on behaviour in general), anthropology (the relationship between norms and culture), economics (the effect of norms on economic behaviour) and legal studies (including a study of social norms as efficient alternatives to legal rules).

With regards to theories of social norms, the vast majority are related to social influences on norm establishment and maintenance. Three such theories are the esteem theory of norms (Cowen, 2002), the group identity theory of norms (Geisinger, 2004), and the closely related social identity theory of norms (Bicchieri and Muldoon 2012). The latter authors note that norms of cooperation are particularly important with regards to the study of norms in general, since norms are commonly assumed to facilitate social order, and social order requires cooperation (Bicchieri and Muldoon 2012).

Some of the literature classes norms as either descriptive or injunctive norms (Interis, 2011; Bicchieri and Muldoon, 2012). Descriptive norms refers to the beliefs that individuals have about what other people actually do, while injunctive norms

refer to what others expect of individuals (Interis, 2011; Bicchieri and Muldoon, 2012). Descriptive norms are those norms that are commonly observed in any society. Injunctive norms are more of an ideal: sustainability norms can be said to be of this type. In addition religion is based on the promulgation of injunctive norms, and has over the course of human history, been an important means of promoting injunctive norms (Norris and Inglehart, 2004).

According to some, modernity and postmodernity are characterised firstly by concern about the descriptive norms evident in many societies, and deep uncertainty about the injunctive norms that should be institutionalised. Leet (1998) for example points to a pervasive lack of an 'overarching consensus on basic values and principles' (p 1), contributing to substantial difficulty in resolving the inevitable conflict that arises from social living.

In addition, gangs and cults are examples of where members comply with descriptive norms to belong to a group, but the group may have a parochial view of the primacy of their own self-interest over the interests of others (Portes, 1998). Injunctive norms in part aim to solve the social dilemma and the adverse consequences of unregulated descriptive norms. An important basis of sustainability is deliberation on determining injunctive norms and closing the gap between descriptive and injunctive norms.

The definition of norms I use is that they are common or accepted behaviours within a defined group of people, which are maintained by social sanctioning. Institutions in contrast I define as the formal rules maintained by legal sanctioning. Norms, used interchangeably here with social norms, are maintained by 'soft regulation', whereby one's peers express approval or disapproval for particular behaviours. It relies on information sharing, repeated interaction, and in some cases, exclusion (Francois, 2008). It is also important to note that these processes also constitute positive externalities of social interaction, often called the 'warm glow' of doing things for others (Waal, 2009). Institutions attempt to enforce behaviours by 'hard regulation', by threats in particular of monetary penalties or incarceration. Enforcement of behaviours based on legal rules tend to have negative externalities of increased costs of monitoring and enforcement (Cannon et al., 2000).

The main advantage of soft regulation via social norms is that it is less resource intensive than hard regulation (Adler, 2001). Social norms establish longer term behaviour change, motivated at least in part by the long term desire to be part of a group. Hard regulation relies to some extent on motivating people in the short term to avoid the threat of punishment, therefore it is only when that threat is salient to people that they might comply (Carbonara et al., 2012).

Often cast as alternative means of governance (Adler, 2001; Ronfeldt, 2006) community, market and the state can be more specifically seen as involving different means of monitoring and enforcing norms. The next section will briefly discuss these three mechanisms of enforcing norms.

### Sanctioning norms: comparing the community, markets and the state

The previous section mentioned that communities use ‘soft sanctioning’ and the market and state use somewhat ‘harder’ sanctioning to try and enforce norms.<sup>43</sup> Community, is based on satisfying basic needs for positive social interaction, for identity and belonging (Ronfeldt, 2006), and on more or less voluntary norm monitoring and enforcement. Communities can form dense networks based on face-to-face relationships, where social approval and disapproval can be immediately expressed to conformists and deviants respectively.

A further important characteristic of communities is that they are based on maintaining boundaries between who is considered to be in the community and who is not considered part of a particular community. This is the first design principle for ‘self-organised collective action’ formulated by Ostrom (2000). She notes the importance of clear boundary rules to enables participants to know ‘who is in and who is out’ of a defined group and therefore who to cooperate with. However a crucial corollary is that communities can be too exclusionary, and can fail to capture gains from exchange with other groups (Rodríguez-Pose and Storper 2006).

The market and state both ultimately rely on hierarchical, authoritative relationships. The state requires vertical relationships between the ‘rulers’ and

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<sup>43</sup> McKenzie-Mohr and Smith (1999) use analogous terminology for the difference between compliance (to avoid punishment) and conformity (more internalised belief in the ‘rightness’ of the norms).



the 'ruled', and reinforces contractual relationships generated via the market. The market is based on conditional, contractual exchange whereby 'mutual obligation' is enforced both for those who are employed and those who are unemployed (for those governments who enforce 'mutual obligation' for the unemployed) (Everingham, 2011). The market specialises in promoting exchange between people who do not have close links (Sahlins 1972; Hart (2008). This is an advantage in potentially somewhat widening people's 'circles of concern' (McNamara, 2012). However it also creates the temptation to engage in negative (unequal) exchange. As Lynch (2008) notes, 'market egoism' has become legitimated, and indeed is functional in motivating the satisfaction of one's own basic needs. However where affiliative links do not exist between two parties, there tends to be less reticence about privileging one's own needs above the needs of others.

There is a view such as expressed by Sutinen (1999) that coercive enforcement is always necessary in any society, at least as a backup, since there is always a subgroup who are immune to moral obligation or social influence. He notes that even if the subgroup of deviants is small, if deviants are allowed to flaunt violation of the law, others may perceive that regulatory procedures are both unfair and ineffective. Many authors however point to the costliness of attempting to gain compliance via the law. For example Gambetta (2000) states that:

societies which rely heavily on the use of force are likely to be less efficient, more costly, and more unpleasant than those where trust is maintained by other means. In the former, resources tend to be diverted away from economic undertakings and spent in coercion, surveillance, and information gathering, and less incentive is found to engage in cooperative activities (p 220).

In a similar vein Bell et al. (2010) point to the problems of 'costly and often difficult-to-enforce regulations' (p 852). When monitoring is carried out from a distance, it tends to be more costly and less effective than monitoring based on regular face to face interaction. As Ogus (1995) shows, monitoring is important to regulation, and the greater the distance, the greater the costs of monitoring. Finally Carbonara et al. (2012) state that legal systems may generate laws that do

not reflect community values, which therefore are likely to be resisted, requiring greater resources to attempt compliance.

In short, the literature identifies that communities do have advantages in particular of requiring less resources to generate norm conformity. Furthermore, the market is linked to promoting norms that are antithetical to the satisfying of socioeconomic needs. Identifying these 'unsustainability norms' is the first step towards identifying sustainability norms. This dissertation uses a two part method of identifying sustainability norms, firstly by identifying unsustainability norms and their antithesis. The second element is then comparing these norms to those identified in the literature, to the extent that this is possible. Identification of unsustainability norms is therefore the topic of the next section.

### Unsustainability norms

The first and arguably one of the most important threats to sustainability is identified in the literature under a number of terms such as 'the social dilemma', egoism, free riding, opportunism, unenlightened self-interest and so on. The term used here, as the first unsustainability norm is negative exchange, borrowing from Sahlins (1972). He defines negative exchange, as the attempt to get something without contributing in return, based on a view that the more resources one can accumulate for oneself, the higher one's status, and more generally the better off one is. Therefore it involves placing one's own self-interest above that of others. Rees (2010) contends that 'natural selection favors those individuals who are most adept at satisfying their short-term selfish needs' (p 15). Likewise Carpini et al. (2004) point to the 'social dilemma' based on narrow self-interest being viewed as rational for individuals to pursue, but the dilemma is that it is harmful for the group. Similarly Etzioni (2000) states that all individuals have different interests and values which can never be made fully compatible.

There has been a relatively substantial amount of literature addressing the existence of the norm of self-interest, co-existing with a norm of concern for the interest of others.<sup>44</sup> Etzioni (2003) is the prime author from the socioeconomic literature pointing to a conflict between 'I' and 'We'. Other contributions include Moore and Loewenstien (2004), who highlight a dual cognitive process consisting of

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<sup>44</sup> 'Others' includes other people, other species, and future generations.

automatic and often unconscious influences on behaviour as well as a 'more thoughtful' process based on a recognition of obligations to others. This concurs with others such as Lynne (2006) and Levine (2006) who pose a 'dual motive' or 'metaeconomic' theory of the co-existence and conflict between self-interest and other interest. What these theories highlight is the difficulty of addressing the automatic and often unconscious tendency to protect one's own material interests and either overtly or covertly seek to impose negative exchange, or 'free ride' on the efforts of others. As just one example of the problems of excessive self-interest, Belousek (2010) highlights the contribution of the failure to control self-interest to the financial crisis of 2008. He illustrates how risky investment in search of self-interested profits adversely affected whole socioeconomies.

The second related unsustainability norm is of inequity. Inequity is justified in capitalist societies as necessary for purportedly maximising efficiency, whereby those who are the most 'productive' are rewarded the most (Streeck, 2011). The discourse on cumulative advantage then shows that at least in capitalist, meritocratic economies, inequality of distribution of material goods tends to follow, whereby 'a favorable relative position becomes a resource that produces further relative gains' (DiPrete and Eirich, 2006, p 271). Once disproportionate gains have been achieved, as Lynch (2008) implies keeping these gains for oneself is 'morally defensible, even morally required'. Streeck (2011) adds that '[c]apitalism as a social order may be defined by the absence of any cultural, normative ceiling on the amount of economic gain individuals can aspire to or imagine achieving' (p 147).

At least in western liberal democratic societies there exists a gross inequality of opportunity to access resources such as education, which then leads to material inequality. As Sayer (2011) notes, where there is a shortage of jobs only those who have managed to gain positive socialisation and a good education gain the good (for example well paid) jobs. This is justified by the view that because success in gaining a good job and upward social mobility are feasible for some, success must be possible for all individuals (Sayer, 2011), which is clearly not the case. While we have the dominant dual system of 'distribution according to desert' (Sayer, 2011), and policies that promote cumulative advantage (Dannefer, 2003), there will continue to be those who are unable to access sufficient resources to satisfy both

their basic material needs, and positive socialising and education to allow the gaining of economic security.<sup>45</sup>

Inequity ultimately results in a greater use of resources than would be used under the norm of equity. Both over and under consumption can lead to resource use that fails to increase wellbeing. In particular the consumption of material goods above a certain level has been shown to fail to increase wellbeing, perhaps in part by the substitution of material need satisfiers for non-material need satisfiers (Jackson 2008; Seyfang and Smith, 2007). Those who have more resources than they need for their own wellbeing may be disengaged from the norm of reciprocity. They may for example live from accumulated wealth rather than providing ongoing value to others. Likewise those who under-consume may be disengaged and/or fail to find employment, therefore rely on social security. In both cases extra resources are required for administering and regulating the systems involved in firstly 'high finance' for the wealthy, and secondly welfare benefits for those dependent on them. In one sense, both over and under consumption reduce productivity, by reducing reciprocity. Productivity is related to how willingly an individual engages in production to benefit others. The greater the level of self-motivation to engage in providing value to others (Bruni, 2008), the less resources that have to be spent externally incentivising what is generally called work effort.

The third unsustainability norm is wasteful and inefficient use of resources<sup>46</sup> (Angus, 2009). This includes both a failure of consumers to choose to consume products with low material input, and a failure of producers to minimise input of resources into production. It also involves negative externalities, in terms of individual consumption causing spill over, adverse effects on others, where the true costs of production are not reflected in prices (Williamson, 1979). For example, consumers may choose to consume food which has been produced with chemicals to kill weeds rather than using human labour, and that has been stored

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<sup>45</sup> Since economic security is currently overwhelmingly gained by secure employment in liberal democratic countries, increasing levels of unemployment points to increasing economic insecurity.

<sup>46</sup> As an example of levels of waste and inefficiency, Angus (2009) notes that in 1998 the World Resources Institute conducted a major international study of the resource inputs used by corporations in major industrial countries of water, raw materials, fuel, and so on. Then they determined what happened to those inputs. They found that a half to three quarters of annual resource inputs to industrial economies are converted to wastes within a year.

and transported long distances (requiring extra packaging, refrigeration and so on), or grow their own food with much less packaging, storage and transportation costs. The negative externalities and the costs of the former are likely to be higher than that of the latter.

Three of the many areas where wasteful and inefficient use of resources can occur is transporting goods and services long distances, producing and distributing goods with high material input (but often low labour input), and the non-sharing of resources (for example ten people in a street all owning a lawn mower, but each only using it for perhaps 30 minutes a week<sup>47</sup>) (Carr-Hill and Lintott, 2002). Failure to reuse and recycle goods is a further source of inefficiency. These all result in less resources being available to satisfy current human needs, the needs of future generations, and of other species.

The fourth norm identified as contributing to unsustainability is a norm of disengagement from collective decision making, in terms of a reluctance to engage in any form of public deliberation. Liberal democracies in one sense encourage this disengagement, by framing our duties in regards to collective decision making as restricted to voting in official elections (Sørensen, 2002). An alternative view is that public deliberation is essential for decision making that supports economic, social and environmental sustainability (Carpini, et al. 2004). The low level of public deliberation is thus highly problematic to the extent that one of our greatest challenges is agreeing on the norms we should live by. Specifically deliberative apathy can result in at least three problems for sustainable wellbeing. These largely derive from the work of Laurian (2009), Carpini et al. (2004) and McCoy and Scully (2002). The first is sub-optimal decision making from a failure to benefit from the input of a broad range of knowledge. The second is the perpetuation of concerns of inequity resulting from 'top down' decision making, dominated by an advantaged minority. Thirdly is the missed opportunity for value change afforded by the social influence that results from deliberation. All these problems contribute to increased resource use, and hence deliberation apathy, or socio-political disengagement is identified as the fourth unsustainability norm.

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<sup>47</sup>The literature also points to positional consumption as a source of inefficient use of resources. However it is outside the scope of this dissertation to explore this further (however see Carr-Hill 2002).

The four unsustainability norms of negative exchange, inequity, inefficiency and socio-political disengagement were thus identified as major barriers to the meeting of socioeconomic needs on which wellbeing depends. In particular, all four norms are likely to lead to increased resource use, leaving less resources for those who currently fail to receive sufficient resources to achieve a minimum quality of life, or for the needs of other species, and for future generations of all species. The four norms identified as countering these norms are reciprocity, equity, efficiency and deliberation. These will now be discussed in terms of a rationale for why they are identified as priority sustainability norms.

### Sustainability norms

With regards to the literature supporting or refuting these four sustainability norms, while there is voluminous literature on many aspects of sustainability, very little explicitly addresses the subject of sustainability norms. Generally where norms towards sustainability are discussed, they are defined very broadly in terms of being pro-social and pro-ecological (Beery, 2013). One exception is Corral-Verdugo et al. (2011), who propose proecological, frugal, equity, and altruism as sustainability behaviours needed to both protect the natural environment and the social environment. While I concur with their overall intent, and specifically the identification of equity as a sustainability norm, I do consider proecological, frugality and altruism as failing to take account of the prevalence of current unsustainability norms, including the extent to which identity is based on consumption.<sup>48</sup> The more that sustainability norms depart from mainstream norms, the less likely they are to be adopted. Kahn (1994) for example notes 'the significance of beginning the work of organizing at the precise psychic, experiential, and ideological place people are in—not the place we want them to be in' (p. xix). Another source is Costanza (2013) who identifies equity or 'social fairness' and the efficient allocation of resources as basic requirements for sustainability, or more specifically for sustainable wellbeing.

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<sup>48</sup> Frugality for example is problematic to the extent when comparing ourselves to others (also called status seeking) in terms of relative consumption, not absolute consumption, is a common norm.

The common element of all four norms that is highlighted here is that they minimise the amount of resources used for a given satisfaction of socioeconomic needs. They will now be discussed individually as follows.

### *Generalised reciprocity*

This dissertation highlights the challenge of ensuring optimising gains from exchange as a major challenge for society. The general term reciprocity is defined as giving, either directly or indirectly, in response to receiving (Komter, 2007). In other words, providing value to others, in response to receiving value from others, either directly or indirectly. Kolm (2008) points to the underlying idea behind reciprocity of 'give and you will be given to', hence reciprocity potentially addresses one of the great challenge of human existence of maintaining sufficiently cooperative relationships to firstly facilitate adaptive learning<sup>49</sup>, and to maintain equitable and efficient wellbeing.

Kolm (2008) continues that:

Communities of all kinds imply reciprocities of mutual help among their members and, often, between each member and the community as such. In particular, a family is primarily an intense reciprocity of services and affection. The political and public sector includes various relations of reciprocity, and the regimes known as "welfare states" add a few important ones concerning aid, health, pensions, and education. Good social relations in general, which are essential for the amenity and value of a society, are sustained by reciprocity (p 1).

The function of reciprocity to the extent it is based on identifying with others and taking their needs into account, is to enable collective action. We will tend not to work with and for others if we think by doing so we will be harmed by the actions of others (Fehr et al., 2002). Reciprocity ensures we do not consciously harm others, and as an internalized norm comprises a low cost form of (self) discipline. The socioeconomic view importantly highlights that good social relations are the foundation for the efficient production of material goods (van Staveren and Knorringa, 2007). Much of the voluminous literature on social capital highlights this dynamic (Annen, 2001). Kolm (2008) states that while reciprocity is the essence of

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<sup>49</sup> Foxon et. al. (2009) point to the importance of adaptive learning in noting the need to be able to absorb disturbance and self-organise, in addition dealing with complexity and uncertainty requires adaptive learning.

families and communities, it enables the markets and organizations to function, while assisting to correct some of their weaknesses.

As Cahn (2000) states, the 'impulse to give back' converts isolated exchanges into an ongoing relationship. He states that reciprocity is 'simultaneously a core value, a moral imperative and a fiscal imperative, combining self-interest and altruism' (p 151). Furthermore '[o]n all levels reciprocity supplies the binding force, the link between present and future return between giving and receiving' (Cahn, 2000, p 151).

John and James (2016) state that reciprocity is the basis of '[u]sing all interactions with others as the key source of enriching our own incredibly limited perspectives. Seeking to create a 'collective sensibility' in conversation where the thoughts, ideas and resulting actions belong not to one individual but to all together' (no pg). They simply point to reciprocity as involving 'a focus on the other'. In a similarly parsimonious manner, Pretty (2008) has a simple rationale for reciprocity - that it reduces the costs of cooperation, that is, of working together.

A major challenge for reciprocity in turn is in controlling negative exchange, otherwise reciprocity erodes below the minimum necessary for any, including market, exchange to occur This is a fundamental assumption of this dissertation: that market exchange does require a minimum level of reciprocity or goodwill (van Staevren and Knorringa, 2007; Bruni, 2008).

An assumption of this dissertation is that reciprocity in effect functions as the 'operating system of all societies'. In other words, without reciprocity, societies cannot function, since we are social creatures who rely on mutual exchange, or interdependence, to survive and thrive. Trust, as a common term of particularly recent work on efficient and adaptive governance (Adler, 2001; Bachmann, 2001) refers here to the confidence that individuals will act reciprocally, in other words, provide value to others without requiring a contract to enforce repayment of their contribution. Any type of interaction between individuals, that is collective action, or cooperation, depends on an element of confidence that individuals are willing to provide a level of value without requiring a guarantee of a return benefit. From a socioeconomic point of view, reciprocity is firstly the fundamental source of bonds between people, as a means of addressing self-interest. Secondly reciprocity



decreases the need for costly contracts to stipulate the responsibilities of both parties.

For Ikerd (1999), generalised reciprocity is closely related to enlightened self-interest, in terms of the motivation to contribute to the needs of others, knowing that others will then be much more likely to contribute to our needs. This addresses the social dilemma, of reconciling self and other interest. Similarly, Levine (2006) contends that reciprocity is fundamental to economic behaviour, being based on giving others benefits 'so they will give us benefits in return'. This refers to the notion of 'enlightened self-interest', whereby looking after the interests of others furthers our own interests (Cropanzano et al., 2001)

The discussion to date in this section has been about the general term of reciprocity, in terms of giving directly or indirectly in response to receiving. The distinction is now made between indirect giving in response to receiving, and the direct response to receiving. This distinction is encapsulated by Sahlins (1972) terms of generalised and balanced reciprocity. Generalised reciprocity, also called generalised exchange, is based on the idea of giving without an explicit requirement for a return benefit (Bruni 2008; Kolm (2008). For example for Molm et al. (2009), generalised reciprocity involves 'actors unilaterally provide benefits to each other without formal agreements' (p 1). Likewise Bruni (2008) defines it as contributing to the needs of others 'without the legal right to, or expectation of, specific immediate returns'. Despite the mention of the unilateral provision of benefits, since generalised reciprocity relies on feelings of obligation to repay debt, short term unilateralism is ultimately rewarded by some form of return benefit.

In essence, the definition of indirect giving in response to receiving is based on an expansive rather than a narrow view of indebtedness - rather than 'tit for tat', it involves a recognition as Cahn (2000) notes, that we are all in effect permanently in debt and can never fully repay it. This is particularly because '[w]e all draw on a common stock: the cumulative knowledge and discoveries of our ancestors, the genetic pool that has demonstrated superior survival capacity and the ecosystems that provide us with a vast array of goods and services' (p. 200). While repaying

debt as conceived by Cahn (2000) is impossible, extending credit (doing things for others) without consciously aiming to specifically and explicitly repay debt may help address this impossibility. Ultimately perhaps sustainable societies require a balance of both, explicitly and voluntarily repaying debt, and voluntarily extending credit to others (in other words taking the initiative of doing things for others without requiring explicit payment).

Other authors use different terms for similar distinctions between generalised exchange and balanced exchange (referring to direct giving in response to receiving, as required in particular by contracts). For example Pretty (2008) uses diffuse reciprocity to refer to generalised reciprocity, and specific reciprocity to refer balanced reciprocity. Diffuse or generalised reciprocity underpins all social interaction and mutual exchange but is unreliable by itself. As Pretty (2008) implies, diffuse reciprocity can only work if effective monitoring can be maintained to detect breaches of reciprocity.

One reason why generalised reciprocity is important is because the lower the levels of the norm of reciprocity, the more that contracts are needed to facilitate exchange. Williamson (1979) however states that particularly in conditions of uncertainty, contracts can never be 'complete', in other words can never cover all contingencies, and in any case become more and more costly the more that contingencies are written into contracts. He (1979) notes for example that 'not all future contingencies for which adaptations are required can be anticipated at the outset. Second, the appropriate adaptations will not be evident for many contingencies until the circumstances materialize' (p. 238). Likewise Gundlach and Achrol (1993) contends that 'for the most part contract law remains 'woefully incomplete', and instead 'relational contract theory' (in essence based on reciprocity) is based on social norms that are much more flexible yet universal, hence can be highly effective in a wide range of circumstances. The incapacity of contracts in some cases to facilitate beneficial exchange adds to the need for reciprocity.

Indeed generalised reciprocity, being analogous to trust, is identified by authors such as Adler (2001) <sup>50</sup> and Gundlach and Achrol (1993) as a third alternative to the market and the state for organising society, in terms of ensuring the maximisation of gains from exchange.<sup>51</sup> One necessity for capturing the benefits of mutual exchange is controlling negative exchange. Generalised reciprocity enforced by social sanctioning is identified as an effective means of controlling negative exchange. While the market and state are often identified as the dominant means of ensuring beneficial exchange, there is a general failure to acknowledge that all human interaction ultimately relies on a level of willingness to provide value to others without requiring a guarantee of a return benefit. The market has evolved at least in part to facilitate exchange of a one off nature between anonymous parties, who cannot be sure of the level of conformance of reciprocity of the other. Money as the means to facilitate market exchange however has then come to be considered a 'good' in its own right. Therefore the motivation exists to marketise as many goods and services as possible, so those who are able to accumulate money, tend to do so to an extent far above the threshold beyond which consumption adds to utility. Hence instead of reciprocity acting as a means of exchange, market exchange has come to dominate human interaction (Manno, 2000).

The main weakness of generalised reciprocity however is that it does not scale easily. When relationships are not based on the combination of proximity, regular interaction and mutual dependence (in other words communal relationships), we are unable to hold others accountable for reciprocity. Sahlin (1972) noted that 'the span of social distance between those who exchange conditions the mode of exchange' (p 196). Kimbrough and Wilson (2013) note that increasing social distance negatively affects the extent to which people discover and exploit gains from exchange (Kimbrough and Wilson, 2011) and contribute to group welfare. The greater the social distance the more the resources are needed to facilitate gains

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<sup>50</sup>Adler (2001) uses the term trust as the means by which a community can mediate beneficial exchange.

<sup>51</sup> Including the gains from specialisation and the division of labour.

from exchange, since there is increased dependence on contractual, market exchange.<sup>52</sup>

Three points can be used to summarise the argument for the identification of generalised reciprocity as the first (and foremost) sustainability norm. The first is that generalised reciprocity involves lower transaction costs than balanced reciprocity (van Staveren and Knorringa, 2007). The second, recognising that balanced exchange does also facilitate mutual exchange, is that generalised reciprocity is the basis for balanced exchange, in other words for economic activity. There is a substantial amount of literature pointing to the importance in particular of social reproduction (Power, 2006). The latter highlights how productivity depends on socialisation (in other words, economic or market exchange depends on social relations). A related argument is that since all contingencies cannot be specified in contracts, this ‘incompleteness of contracts’ requires an element of goodwill, or generalised reciprocity (Rao, 2003). The third is that generalised reciprocity (particularly in the sense of responding to like with like, hence punishing the transgression of norms) is the basis of social sanctioning, as a main means of enforcing norm compliance (Etzioni, 2000)

### Equity

The second sustainability norm, important in its own right, but also necessary to support reciprocity is the norm of equity. For Costanza (2013), equity or ‘[s]ocial fairness means that ... resources are distributed fairly within this generation, between generations, and between humans and other species’ (no pg). When there is substantial inequity, exchange is no longer ‘mutual’, that is, is less likely to be voluntary, and therefore may require expensive contracts and use of the law. The greater use of resources is inimical to ecological sustainability, and compromises the meeting of social needs of positive social interaction based on equitable exchange. Equity here refers to the maintenance of minimum and maximum levels of material consumption, such that all are able to meet their basic needs.

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<sup>52</sup> The other alternative is transitive trust, where if person A does not know person B, but does know person C who also knows A, then person C can vouch for person B to person A. In addition, reputation can be used to facilitate beneficial exchange, such as EBay relies on.

Rather than contending that there should be absolute equality of access to material resources, a more realistic conceptualisation is that it is fair that all should have access to a minimum of resources to meet basic needs. The corollary is that a maximum should also be enforced firstly because of a scarcity of resources, such that more for some means less for others. Secondly diminishing marginal utility of consumption means that beyond a certain level extra consumption tends not to lead to greater quality of life (Jackson, 2008; Speth, 2008). Jackson (2008) points to a 'mismatch hypothesis' where identifies a divergence between economic growth and human wellbeing or contentment. Likewise the 'Hirsch hypothesis' states that as incomes rise, expenditure on status goods (which may not increase wellbeing) tends to increase (Speth, 2008). Speth (2008) also points to rising costs as consumption moves from meeting basic needs to 'consumer satisfaction', and contends that consumption should grow until the increasing costs equal the benefits, and then cease to grow at that point. Finally Speth notes that there is an element of consumption used to satisfy not material needs but social psychological needs, hence leading to overconsumption of material goods (also see Seyfang 2006).

Both Costanza (2013) and Corral-Verdugo et al. (2013) identify equity as a sustainability behaviour, relating to the sharing of the satisfaction of needs between the present and future generations, and within the current generations. Corral-Verdugo et al. (2013) further state that equity also implies a balance between human wellbeing and the integrity of ecosystems.

### *Efficiency*

The third sustainability norm is the norm of efficiency, which refers to minimising inputs into the production and distribution of goods and services. Costanza (2013) identifies efficient allocation of resources as important for sustainable wellbeing, whereby finite resources are used as efficiently as possible. The definition of efficiency used here borrows from the feminist, ecological economic view proposed, for example, by Power (2006) as 'the least wasteful means of achieving outcomes society has openly and democratically chosen to value'. Likewise Manno (2000) notes that while a neoclassical definition of efficiency may refer to 'the most product with the least input', an alternative view is the gaining of the most

satisfaction from the least product. In a similar vein, van Staveren (2003) highlights an understanding of efficiency as the minimisation of waste.

Efficiency involves two elements: one of consumers choosing goods and services that have relatively low material inputs, and the other of producers and distributors using production and distribution techniques with minimal inputs. Efficiency is cited as a sustainability norm in part because of its implications for the total resource base: a high level of inefficiency results in less resources able to be shared between all (Costanza, 2013). Currently the impacts of inefficiency tend to fall disproportionately on the poor (Angus, 2009).

A final note is that due to the previously mentioned rebound effect, efficiency must be combined with equity. Unless limits are placed on consumption, increasing efficiency may merely lead to increased consumption (Vlek and Steg, 2007).

### *Deliberation*

The fourth sustainability norm of deliberation accords with Laurian's (2009) note of the potential benefits to society in general of participatory and deliberative processes. These benefits include increased quality of decision making, increased legitimacy of decision making processes, social learning, human capital and social capital building (Laurian, 2009). The benefit of deliberation from a sustainability point of view can be summarised in three points. The first is that collective decision making can improve strategies and decision making resulting on the availability of a greater range of knowledge towards sustainable wellbeing. The second is that where deliberation results in broad participation in decision making, concerns of inequity may be eased. In particular there may be less fears that rules will be made in favour of an advantaged minority. Thirdly the interaction that deliberation is based on can, via social influence, change values away from anti-socioecological towards pro socioecological values. Carpini et al. (2004) add to this point stating:

talking in public with other citizens is a form of participation, one that arguably provides the opportunity for individuals to develop and express their views, learn the positions of others, identify shared concerns and preferences, and come to understand and reach judgments about matters of public concern. Such exchanges are a central way of clarifying and negotiating deep divisions over material interests and moral values; they are also critical for publicly airing disagreements that have not been articulated

or have been incompletely stated because so many citizens have withdrawn from electoral and legislative politics (P 319)

Chambers (in Carpinì et al 2004) imply that a central outcome of all deliberation is the transformation of values and the changing of attitudes. Deliberation in part requires a willingness to engage with difference, and to constructively work with conflict. McCoy and Scully (2002) note that '[m]ost people do not enter community life or politics through doors marked 'civic life' or 'engagement': Instead, they find themselves inside after they start working on an issue about which they care deeply. Once they try to make progress on the issue, they realize that they need to engage other people in finding and implementing solutions' (p 118). This highlights not only deliberation but the synergies of positive social relations in general. One particular significance of deliberation is the necessity of debating consumption-utility thresholds.

By way of summary, the sustainability norms capable of addressing 'unsustainability norms' are therefore defined as reciprocity, equity, efficiency and deliberation. Until these norms are adopted as mainstream norms, significant amounts of resources will continue to be used that do not add to the wellbeing of current human populations, and which comprise the survival of other species, and of future human generations.

These are proposed as interim priority norms which require deliberation to gain agreement on their usefulness as sustainability norms. Since sustainability is proposed as involving a journey rather than a destination, it is likely sustainability norms will need to adapt to changing technological, political, economic, environmental and social conditions into the future.

## Conclusion

The main aims of this chapter were to analyse the literature on sustainability and on norms to arrive at a synthesis of both terms to assist in ideas about human survival and thriving. A moderate view of our sustainability challenge, and of the pathways towards sustainability was the first outcome of this analysis. Issues of feasibility, particularly of taking account of current mainstream norms were a major factor in this conclusion.

A second outcome was the highlighting of norms as crucial for sustainability, as behaviours that are accepted as being desirable within a particular group. It was

noted that the organising of society benefits from deliberation about both non-negotiable and negotiable norms. However by way of contributing to the debate on non-negotiable sustainability norms, four were identified as having potential to support sustainability. Generalised reciprocity was identified firstly as virtually a 'meta-sustainability norm' as the mechanism necessary for societies to exist. Without a minimum level of trust in generalised reciprocity, which can also be goodwill, society simply could not function, there would not be a sufficient amount of collective action on which our interdependent societies are based. A minimum level of reciprocity is required to generate the level of collective action needed for our current immense challenges, particularly of climate change and economic contraction.

The other three sustainability norms are deemed as important in their own right and being necessary to support generalised reciprocity. Equity, efficiency and deliberation are all aimed at conserving resources to allow everyone to satisfy their basic needs, and preserve resources for other species and future generations. The issue of agreement on what constitutes basic needs for the diversity of cultures and individuals that sustainable societies are comprised of is also important. Ultimately when some are denied opportunities to meet basic needs, and others take much more than they need, there is substantial wastage and a smaller amount of resources for everyone. The norm of providing value to others unconditionally, if accompanied by social sanctioning and norms of equity, efficiency and deliberation, gives us a chance of living within our means.



### 3. Community and the conceptual framework

#### Introduction

Chapter two identified a moderate view of sustainability as having the potential to balance between mobilising a greater number of people to change norms, and communicating a level of change required that does not lead to decreased quality of life, and is (theoretically) within the capability of the majority of people. Norms were defined as the acceptable behaviours within a defined group of people, whereby a significant motivation to belong to a (place-based) group of people provides the motivation to conform to the norms of the group. The use of norms in general tends to refer to descriptive norms, being the norms that can be observed to operate within a group. In contrast sustainability norms are injunctive in terms of ideal norms that are identified to achieve a certain outcome. Four norms were identified as priorities to progress towards sustainability of reciprocity, equity, efficiency and deliberation.

This chapter focuses on one of the other major themes of this dissertation alongside sustainability: community. Just some of the many authors who highlight links between sustainability and community are Seyfang and Smith (2007), Berry (2002) and Curtis (2003). Drawing on these and other authors, three main elements of this relationship are highlighted here. The first is that we have the most incentive, in particular using the least resources, to attend to the health of the local environment we live in, and to attend to establishing and maintaining local positive social relationships. There is a high degree of motivation to belong to a community, as a means of security which the market and state are ultimately unable to provide. Secondly we have the greatest physical capacity to look after the health of our local environment and engage in beneficial mutual exchange. This is where feedback is both physically more possible, and it is in the interests of local people to monitor local socioecological conditions and take any necessary action. The third element is the synergies of proximal relationships based on regular interaction as the basis of effective, relatively low cost social sanctioning. In other words, communities can foster voluntary conformance to norms, thus minimising more costly external sanctioning by the market and state. These three factors provide the foundation of the argument that communities are the most crucial ultimate means of fostering sustainability norms. It is not however

suggested that communities by themselves are singlehandedly capable of addressing the complexity and uncertainty surrounding social sanctioning, including crucially addressing current levels of unsustainability norms. Likewise it is not suggested that communities and 'localism' do not have serious weaknesses. Indeed a major argument is that communities do have inherent weaknesses and have failed to sufficiently adapt to socioecological change, and the trust (in reciprocity) which is the prime mechanism by which they operate, is currently at problematically low levels. The 'decline of communities' thesis therefore suggests that sustainable societies are currently difficult to achieve. A rebalancing of stronger communities away from reliance on the market and state is suggested as a fruitful way forward.

In analysing the ability of communities and community socioeconomic initiatives to foster sustainability norms, this chapter is structured as follows. It commences with a literature review of community organised into four themes. The first theme links community to sustainability, particularly in terms of the significant role of communities in sustainable wellbeing. Some of the literature identifies community as the basic source of cooperation and interdependence, indeed as a 'life support system', and hence as the fundamental mode of organisation required for societal organisation. A related concept is of community as the basis of localisation (and towards 'glocalisation').<sup>53</sup>

The second theme from the literature identifies firstly a 'decline thesis', of families, communities and generalised reciprocity (whereby the literature suggests trends of declines in trust). The second aspect is identifying weaknesses of communities which impact on their capacity to foster norms. The third theme paradoxically identifies positive trends regarding communities, firstly whereby governments appear to be increasingly seeking to engage with communities to address complex socioecological problems. In addition the rise of the 'knowledge economy' points to the need for more flexible modes of economic relationships than can be achieved via contract, that is via the trust promulgated by communal

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<sup>53</sup> Glocalisation refers in one sense to acting locally, thinking globally. In addition Robertson (2012) implies the out the co-existence of both the expansion of economic global relations as well as increased focus on localities.

relationships. Also highlighted is the capacity of information and community technologies to act as a tool allowing people with common interests to connect.

The fourth theme briefly discusses new concepts of communities in the literature, such as the idea of ‘collaborative community’ (Adler and Heckscher, 2005). The emphasis is on increasing bridging ties from communities to other communities, and to the market and state. These first four themes show that as well as strengths of communities on fostering sustainability norms, on the other hand, they mirror the imperfect people that make up communities, hence communities are also not perfect. In particular, they require attention to the process of monitoring and enforcing of norms to overcome negative exchange, inequity, inefficiency and socio-political disengagement. Community socioeconomic initiatives (CSIs) appear to have the potential to strengthen community in a broad sense (that is procedurally), as well as directly target unsustainability norms. This chapter therefore then discusses CSIs and their potential for fostering sustainability norms. The next part of the chapter outlines the conceptual framework for the research, comprising interdisciplinarity, socioeconomics and post-normal science. Then a theory of change is briefly outlined that identifies how localised norm change can generate institutional change. The final section consists of the conclusion to the chapter.

### Community and sustainability

The first part of this section aims to look broadly at how communities are conceived of in the literature, and then to narrow the analysis to look at links between community and sustainability. Definitions of community in a diverse range of (often socioeconomic) literature tends to distinguish between place-based definitions, in terms of a group of people who have a commonality of residing in the same location, or interest-based definitions, where connections between people are based on shared interests, regardless of proximity (Stimson, et al. 2005). A common thread between the two is of intrinsic motivation or voluntarism, where a community can be seen as a group of people who choose to associate with each other, whether in order to belong to a group and/or because of other shared interests.

Community is posed as functioning as an 'extended family', where the generalised reciprocity, that is, goodwill, that emanates from family relationships is necessary to some degree for all other relationships. The family as the basic unit of community as implied by Bubolz (2001), O'Hara (2004) and Stone and Hughes (2002).

Popenoe (2012) in fact points to a view within sociology and anthropology that the family is a society's most basic institution. He cites Margaret Mead's contention that '[a]s families go, so goes the nation'. The implication, Popenoe contends, is that as 'the fundamental provider of human welfare and basis of moral order' (p xi), the fate of our societies is strongly linked to how well our families function. The importance of families for social life is highlighted by Haidt and Graham (2009) who note the heritage of Tönnies, Durkheim, and Weber in identifying the voluntary compliance to the rules and restraints necessary for social life as based in the 'natural sociability of the family'. Jenson (2004) notes it is generally assumed across a variety of cultures that families have primary responsibility for ensuring the well-being of their children. Likewise Kendrick (2013) notes that the public generally recognises an important responsibility of families in ensuring the wellbeing of all family members, that is the satisfying of socioeconomic needs. He notes further that families have the most stake in the outcomes of the success or failure in meeting socioeconomic needs, and hence are most motivated to achieve them. They have to live on a daily basis with the long-term consequences of 'wellbeing failures' to a greater extent than any other party, apart from the person themselves. Goldstein (2006) supports the view that much of our social, economic, environmental and political engagement occurs at the local (community) level, made possible by embeddedness in families.

Work by Clark and Mills (2012) on the concept of communal relationships, which they contrast with exchange relationships is helpful to identify the link of communities and generalised reciprocity. Communal relationships are based on one or both partners feeling a special responsibility for the welfare of the other. That is, benefits are given non-contingently, or unconditionally, that is via relationships of generalised reciprocity. Hence the donor does not expect a specific benefit in return for giving a benefit; benefits are given in support of the partner's welfare

non-contingently. In the case of exchange relationships, a specific and equal benefit is expected, according with Sahlins (1972) concept of balanced exchange.

Clark and Mills (2012) note that most people have a relatively small number of strong communal relationships, and a larger number of weaker communal relationships. They note 'that after all, there is a limit on the number of people for whom an individual can assume responsibility' (p. 240). This alludes to the concepts of the drawing of boundaries as will be further discussed later in this chapter.

According to Pretty et al (2006), common elements to a 'sense of community' include membership, feelings of emotional safety with a sense of belonging and identification; ability to exert influence on the community with reciprocal influence of the community on oneself, integration and fulfilment of physical and psychological needs, and crucially the reinforcing of behaviour acceptable to the community. Other authors who directly emphasise the role of community in satisfying needs of security and welfare include Kendrick (2013) and Bowles and Gintis (1998). Likewise Rai and Fiske (2011) contend that ' [community] is directed toward caring for and supporting the integrity of in-groups through a sense of collective responsibility and common fate. If someone is in need, we must protect and provide for that person; if someone is harmed, the entire group feels transgressed against and must respond. A threat to the group of its integrity, or to any member of it, is felt to be a threat to all' (p. 60). This encapsulates the idea that community as extended family is of crucial importance to our survival and thriving.

Likewise Pearson (1995) notes:

the purpose of community is to exhibit a particular version of the general welfare, an egalitarian one, whose sustenance in turn presumes a special sort of political and economic organization On the one hand, they represented a buffer against what we might consider certain types of unhappiness (starvation, for example, and pillage and murder); on the other hand, they represented a resource that could be employed by members in their efforts to improve their individual situation (p 45).

Rai and Fiske (2011) further highlight the reciprocity that binds communities together, in terms of providing aid within the community without requiring evidence of 'earned merit' or expectation of repayment of debt. Likewise

Everingham (2011) states '[t]he reciprocity at work in traditional communities is essentially non-formalised; it involves give and take by members of the community in ways that cannot be specified without losing what is truly the 'social glue' of the relationship - the experience of interdependence of members of that community' (p. 110). And Peck (1988) contends that the single most common thing members express about community is the feeling of safety that it gives. Similarly for Walzer (2008), membership of a community is the primary good people can facilitate for each other, as the basic source of security and welfare.

In short it is in the interests of communities to ensure they both have a healthy physical environment, and can progress towards the equitable and efficient meeting of socioeconomic needs.

Ultimately families and communities are our best source of someone who will provide security when we most need it; they comprise the people we trust the most to act in our best interests (Bellaby, 2010). When we interact via the market or state, we may be less certain that others will act in our best interests.

The significance of community can also be seen in the concept of 'communal mastery' (Norris 2008), whereby work by McKenzie-Mohr and Smith (1999) points to communal mastery as a vital aspect of being willing to react positively to ecological imperatives, rather than either deny they exist, or to believe that nothing can be done to address ecological imperatives, to ensure ecosystems can function adequately as life support systems.

In short, the group identity theory of norms (Geisinger, 2004) could be expanded to a group identity theory of community: that we seek community to satisfy needs of belonging to a group, based on the 'social fact' of interdependence. While the state is ostensibly charged with the security and welfare of all citizens within a country (Camilleri, 1994), it is in fact within communities that the foundation of security and welfare is in one sense established. This has enormous motivating potential to maintain community ties (Danielsen, 2005).

Stevenson (2002) echoes the view that communities are important for providing security and forming the basis of cooperation. On the latter point as Pearson (1995) notes, communities use 'moral suasion' or generalised reciprocity, to promote norm internalisation, as a more cost effective method of fostering

particular norms than more formal more coercive means of achieving compliance with norms.

Granovetter (2005) points to the capacity of dense networks to enforce norms, whereby 'greater density makes ideas about proper behaviour more likely to be encountered repeatedly, discussed and fixed; it also renders deviance from resulting norms harder to hide and, thus, more likely to be punished' (p 34).

However Stevenson (2002) also notes that the way community is often posed as being homogenous belies an important function of communities in addressing the challenges of diversity. He contends instead that communities do often tend to involve struggles, conflict, and contestations, requiring ongoing work on the part of the community to address this conflict. Stevenson (2002) states that 'In fact, we need to embrace these very tensions if we are to discover, or rediscover, community as a life system of the twenty-first century'.

Two related elements ascribed to communities in the literature, as Stevenson (2002) notes, are in terms of 'completeness', as a locale where people can (potentially) obtain all the necessities for day to day living. The second element is of place attachment (Williams, 2002), whereby people may identify with particular locations, hence increasing their commitment to that location.

One crucial aspect identified so far has related to the motivation individuals have to belong to a community, and hence to conform to the norms that the community either consciously or unconsciously sees as important. Similarly, extra motivation is likely to exist to care for the local environment. Just as many have a preference for the relationships that dominate their day to day life to be positive and constructive, living in a particular locality we are likely to want a good environment to live in and therefore be motivated to conserve the quality of our local environment (Zuindeau, 2006).

To conclude there are at least three reasons whereby communities can be seen as significant in terms of sustainability.<sup>54</sup> The first relates to motivation and incentives, that it is in our interests to look after our local area environmentally,

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<sup>54</sup> A fourth rationale for focusing on communities in terms of addressing sustainability which is outside the scope of this dissertation further relates to governance and the effectiveness of endogenous decision making tailored to the particularities of different localities.

socially, and perhaps increasingly in an economic sense. It is place-based communities that are most relevant to the satisfaction of socioeconomic needs, and where it is in our interests to maintain positive social relationships, to benefit from mutual exchange and satisfy social needs via those relationships that tend to dominate most people's lives, that is, those whom we have face to face, regular interaction with. Likewise it is also most in our interests to conserve our local environment.<sup>55</sup> The second reason is that it is more efficient in terms of using less resources to look after the place we live in, rather than focusing on looking after places that are distant.<sup>56</sup> Focussing on maintaining healthy local socioecological systems is also resource efficient. Being able to gain virtually instant, low cost feedback about socioecological conditions is one important element here. Another is the reduced travel required to look after one's own environment.

Thirdly, place-based communities in one respect are the most efficient means of social sanctioning, and in turn social sanctioning has significant advantages for fostering norms. The unique capacity for communities to monitor and enforce rules and regulations is highlighted here as providing the potential at least for communities to make an effective contribution to societal organisation. Face to face, regular interaction provides a basis for rewarding for conformance and punishing for deviation from particular norms<sup>57</sup> via face to face regular interaction. Strong bonds form the basis of communities being an effective source of socialisation, in other words by facilitating the transmission of social norms. Stephan and Ybarra (2009) point to linkages between local social relationships and influencing norms in noting the benefits of small groups such as satisfying needs of acceptance, belonging, and social support, stating that the needs that community fill are as 'dear to us as life itself'. They then identify the system of roles, rules, norms, values, and beliefs to guide behaviour as an important function of small groups.

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<sup>55</sup> A corollary is that we may not be motivated to help mitigate climate change, due to perceptions it is more of a global than a local issue.

<sup>56</sup> While recognising that there are also some benefits in helping to look after distant places, for example during natural disasters, and/or if there is low levels of community capacity in a particular locality.

<sup>57</sup> In the economics literature this process tends to be expressed as creating incentives for people to behave in certain ways.



There is a large amount of literature in the economics and socioeconomic areas which highlights the role of socialisation and sanctioning in establishing norms of reciprocity (for example Fehr and Gächter 2000, and Guttman 2001). Etzioni (1993) contends that community is the most important source of moral voice, that is, it provides the mechanism for the aligning of individual and social interests. Regular interaction creates a 'shadow of the future' (Axelrod, 1980) where people cooperate to avoid gaining a reputation as a non-reciprocator.

Ostrom (2000) is one particularly important author in terms of her work on communities as solving the tragedy of the commons<sup>58</sup>, based on bounded groups that devise and enforce their own rules, using graduated sanctioning. Ostrom (2000) also specifically points to polycentric organisation based on multiple centres of decision making, with an increased role for communities in decision making.

Furthermore Lindenberg (2013) identifies monitoring as a key aspect of norm enforcement, which confirms communities as a low resource means of enforcing norms. Bowles and Gintis (2002) note that communities are much more likely to have vital information about members' capacities, behaviours and needs which governments and markets will generally not have. The other alternative of seeking compliance via formal norms, or the law, involves much higher costs of monitoring and enforcement (Cannon et al., 2000).<sup>59</sup>

To conclude, an important aspect of community is that they are a place-based group of people who feel a special responsibility for the wellbeing of the rest of the people in the community. The significance of being place-based is that the people in the group have a greater capacity to assist towards the wellbeing of someone who is physically close than someone who is physically distant. Likewise place-based communities generally have greater motivation and greater physical capacity to look after the local environment. Special responsibility both from an environmental and social sustainability perspective best resides within a place-based community. This is because in particular, a person's needs can best be

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<sup>58</sup> The tragedy of the commons refers to the perception that any shared and unregulated resource will be insufficiently conserved by individuals acting in their own self-interest (see Ostrom, 2010)

<sup>59</sup> Cannon et al (2000) also point out that contracts can be useful for identifying 'unspoken assumptions' and divergent expectations.

determined proximally than from afar, and less resources are required for travel to determine and to give the assistance needed.

In short, communities, as a group of people who interact regularly in a specific location predominantly via reciprocity, are identified as crucial for sustainability. The concept of communities that highlights their significance for sustainability is that they can act as an 'extended family', whose prime function is to look after the household. Hart (2008) and Wadsworth (2010) both point out that it is management of the household (which has been linked etymologically to both ecology and economics) which was once the 'primary living system of exchange' and which is the prime site of our survival. In short we are motivated to belong to communities to benefit from social support, to affirm our worth. Once embedded in community, generalised reciprocity is the means of efficiently monitoring and enforcing norms, by social ostracism, censure and so forth.

If a major challenge of sustainability is 'living together in meaningful ways', place-based communities as extended prosumer families are contended to have the greatest potential for achieving this goal that is so fundamental to human survival.

A further means of highlighting the significance of communities for sustainability is in relation to the linking of localisation and sustainability. This is well encapsulated in the 'ecolocal' theory of Curtis (2003). Curtis's concept of ecolocalism explicitly seeks to critique mainstream economics, involving as it does consideration of phenomena such as '[l]ocally heterogeneous ecosystems, products and consumer tastes, subsistence production, non-maximizing consumer behaviour and shared forms of consumption' (no pg). Curtis (2003) highlights that 'eco-local economic theory' provides an alternative to the assumptions of neoclassical economic theory, including the latter's assumption of maximising consumers. Instead of ignoring externalities, it explicitly advocates minimising negative externalities, and capturing positive externalities (see also Galtung 1986). Just as one example, a link can be made between social sanctioning and non-maximising consumer behaviour - when people are being regularly monitored (albeit in a benevolent way), they may be more likely to conform to non-maximising behaviour.

For Galtung (1986) the addressing of externalities (or cost shifting) is an important rationale for localisation via increased self-reliance. He contends that there is a clear justification for producing what we consume and consuming what we produce. This can then allow the capturing of the positive side effects (or externalities) of local production and consumption, and reduce negative side effects.

There are many other similar concepts in the literature equating to the basic idea that sustainability can be most effectively achieved by the actions of communities in their local environment via cooperative relationships maintained within the community. Bioregionalism is one such concept, which Sale (1991) has outlined as based on self-reliance and intimate knowledge of the land and of people's increased knowledge of each other as the basis of increased capacity to preserve socio-ecological systems. Roelvink and Gibson-Graham (2009) also point to bioregionalism as crucially involving 'an attachment to all that supports one's life'. In one respect bioregionalism is a more realistic concept than localisation in terms of recognising the extent to which 'all that supports one's life' can no longer feasibly be drawn locally beyond a certain level. Regionalism may capture the idea of a compromise between satisfying our material needs globally on the one hand versus locally on the other.

The definition I use of community has three elements. Communities (at least the strong version) are place-based groups of people who engage in joint socioeconomic need satisfaction, who socially sanction each other, and who use generalised reciprocity as their main means of exchange. The next section will discuss the literature a decline of these types of communities, and weaknesses of communities in general.

### [The decline thesis and community weaknesses](#)

The greatest problem with the potential of communities to foster sustainability norms is the current lack of the type of community defined here as vital for sustainability. Over time there has been a gradual erosion of the extent to which we satisfy our material and nonmaterial needs within place-based groups without relying on market exchange. Many authors point to a decline of both extended families and nuclear families (Ciscel and Heath, 2001; Hughes and Stone, 2006;

Popenoe, 2012). For Popenoe (2012) there are strong indications that the family is in decline, that it is losing 'social power' and social functions, losing influence over behaviour and opinion, and generally becoming less important in life.

Popenoe (2012) uses the term 'de-institutionalisation' where the family's capacity to influence norms has decreased, at least compared to the market and state.

Popenoe (2012) highlights that family decline is more serious than any previous decline because it is the nuclear family in particular that is becoming less functional, with serious consequences for children. O'Hara (2004) likewise points to a lack of stability and uncertainty, and generally diminished bonds within families contributing to negative effects in a socioeconomic sense. The implication is that there is a decrease of relationships where people feel responsible for the welfare of others.

Gurstein (2000) therefore notes that while many people in Western countries belong to communities of work and/or leisure, they often do not feel any sense of identification with their 'home' community, he notes that for many people there may not even be a cohesive home community for them to belong to. The existence of communities who can effectively sanction members therefore has dramatically declined, to the extent that it appears that 'pseudo-communities' outweigh true communities. For example Pretty (2008) notes in the context of natural resource management, that local capacity has been undermined to the point that communities are now unable to monitor, regulate and protect their local resources. Another common example of pseudo-community is on-line communities who may lack a commitment to each other beyond online interaction (Jones, 1998). The welfare state as Carlson (1995) notes has reduced the socioeconomic need satisfaction role of families, which is a source of community building, of building reciprocity as the internalised motivation of the provision of value. In fact the neoliberal/enlightenment project was precisely to free individuals from oppressive community constraints. But this has contributed to a decline in the capacity to satisfy a fundamental need on which societal survival depends - positive social interaction, including provision of social support systems. The family is the ultimate social support system, who one can reasonably expect to give emotional, instrumental and informational support to one regardless of

whether one can reciprocate or not, regardless of the extent to which one is 'undeserving', has transgressed social and legal norms (Kendrick, 2013).

The argument of Putnam (1995) is seminal regarding his thesis that social capital has been decreasing in America. The words used to define social capital are all related to the relationships that communities are based on, for example Dasgupta (2000) links social capital to 'social relations [which] create value through reciprocity which closely related to trust' (p 226). Walters (2002) suggests a number of reasons for the decline Putnam identified, including the growth of the welfare state, changes in family and occupational structure, and shifting patterns of residential life, most notably suburbanization. Technological, social, political and economic changes both impact on the actual capacities of communities to generate pro-social norms, and contribute to changed expectations of the role of communities in attaining societal goals. Other factors include increased use of market provisioning replacing some elements of social provisioning (Ciscel and Heath, 2001).

Putnam's conclusions of social capital decline are contested, however Walters (2002) points to the general finding that in America at least, the majority of people perceive that over the last 40 years, many important elements of their society have become worse. This is predicted by 'decline sociology' (Hookway, 2015), which analyses whether there has been a decrease in morals in recent human history. According to Bowles and Gintis (1998) the norm of generalised reciprocity can be seen as analogous to the presence of morals. This follows Durkheim's (in Hookway 2105) view of morals as 'the necessary binding force for togetherness'; in other words, morals (and generalise reciprocity) addresses the social dilemma of reconciling individual and social interests.

In discussing decline sociology, Hookway (2015) draws on Durkheim who contends that a process of moral loss, collapse and fragmentation has occurred, in part due to the rise of the 'disembedded self'. Modernity in this view is cast as 'de-moralising', by reducing both opportunities for and motivation to engage in building social relationships. Berger (1988) points to how modernity has promoted shallow commitments to a relatively large number of different groups, whereby the individual does not have full loyalty to any particular group. He notes crucially

that a result is that this trend reduces the constraints communities would normally have over their members; instead constraints are in theory at least provided by a greater number of less proximate sources. Berger (1998) notes this is often viewed positively as providing greater freedom, to be free of community constraints (Welzel et al., 2001). On the other hand, it may be seen as linked to alienation, due to a lack of the identity once provided by immersion in community. In addition, anomie may result from a reduced source of meaning, from receiving contradictory paradigms from different groups.

The ‘end of history’ (Arvanitakis, 2009) is reached when people voluntarily pursue the individualist route of material wealth, compromising social relationships. This is reflected in the prevalence of ‘unsustainability norms’ discussed earlier. Instead of provisioning being a communal affair, modernity calls us to become ‘entrepreneurs of the self’, to take responsibility on an individual basis for satisfaction of our needs, at least our material needs.

This theme also highlights the function of strong boundaries within which strong ties operate to bind communities together. A sense of a shared fate and increased sense of security from relationships of goodwill with those physically closest to us, who are most able and the most motivated to look after our welfare, contributes to bonding within communities. The resources we have available however to devote to this process are limited. Limits on time and energy are two of the major reasons why we often discriminate between those in our community and those we consider outside it.<sup>60</sup>

The corollary is of negative consequences of communities treating outsiders less favourably than insiders, including losing a valuable source of learning. Communities may then lose adaptability and reduced capacity to both detect and adapt to changing environments, and therefore become less ‘resilient’.

A somewhat related concept is of ‘negative social capital’, which refers to the maintenance particularly of anti-social norms within a strong community, who do not have connections (referred to as ‘weak ties’ in the social capital literature) to

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<sup>60</sup> The number of 150 is suggested by Dunbar as the limit of the ‘people we can keep track of, in terms of knowing personally, these are insiders, others we tend to see as ‘outsiders’, or less critical to our day to day life.

other communities. This results in both less feedback on the non-beneficial aspect of anti-social norms, and less opportunity for role modelling of pro-social norms. Sub-cultures, gangs, cults, terrorist groups, and fundamentalist religious groups all may promote norms that are detrimental to society at large (Cox, 1999), yet these norms are transmitted by the same process as pro-social norms, that is, via social sanctioning. Communities can therefore be seen to have a 'dark' side; they are not necessarily always beneficial (Cox, 1999).

Strong bonding relationships tend to cultivate a sense of 'us versus them', exacerbating the human tendency to denigrate outgroups (Dickinson, 2009). Communities are thus often accused of being insular and conservative (Etzioni, 1996). This is a major challenge for communities to maintain relationships of goodwill despite difference, whether within the community or with other communities.

When some element of a place-based community who engage in joint socioeconomic need satisfaction, these communities still have at least two specific weaknesses. The first is of social closure. Mackert (2012) defines closure as the drawing boundaries, constructing identities, and building communities in order to monopolize scarce resources for one's own group, thereby excluding others from using them. However the emphasis here is on limiting the size of a community group within which processes of social sanctioning can operate.

Boyden (2004) notes the idea of concentric circles of empathy may have its origins in the Stoics doctrine of *oikeiosis* - that 'human affection radiates outward from oneself', decreasing as the distance (physically and psychologically) increases between oneself and others. Kasper (1998) concurs, stating 'the evidence is clear: when interacting with outgroups, people usually need a motivation other than love and solidarity' (p 61), implying that community inevitably declines with social distance.

Communities must draw boundaries around who is and who isn't included in a particular community (Ostrom, 2000), but those outside the group tend to be discriminated against, in terms of treated differently by those within the group. This is a dilemma of human existence of a tendency to treat outsiders as having lower worth (Kimbrough and Wilson, 2013).

A second element of the weakness of communities is as Jones (2015) implies, a tendency to avoid conflict and discord at the small group level, contributing to a level of reluctance to use punishments to enforce norms. This can promote negative exchange, which threatens broader levels of cooperation. This includes a weakness of both 'functional' communities and 'dysfunctional' communities (although worse in dysfunctional communities), is a lack of consistent application of negative sanctioning, in other words of punishing community members for non-adherence to social norms. Etzioni (1993) reflects this view in stating:

As no society can thrive without a moral order, especially if heavy reliance on the state is to be avoided, the moral voice, carried by communities that are intact or reconstituted - must be re-raised. The moral voice is the main way communities keep moral order, other than relying on individual consciences...although there is a possibility that such voices may be raised too stridently, on most issues we are currently whispering at best. Moreover too many fear laying moral claims on one another, lest they be considered self-righteous (p. 53).

While Etzioni (1993) refers to a general tendency of a reluctance to apply negative sanctions, research by Steinberg et al (1994) implies that different types of parenting can have different outcomes for socialisation. They identify firstly the existence of distinct parenting types such as authoritarian, neglectful and indulgent, and secondly indicate some of the implications for each style on the norms internalised by children. Neglectful and indulgent parenting styles for example, can lead to children who lack trust in others and therefore have difficulty relating to others. Relatedly both Elchardus (2009) and Popenoe (2012) contend that reduced deference to authority is one trend of modern living. When the responsibility for transmitting norms to children is virtually the sole responsibility of one or two parents, this may be insufficient for these and other reasons to provide an adequate process of norm transmission (Etzioni 1993). Peck (1988) adds weight to this argument in noting the positive contribution that a larger rather than a very small number of people can make to the process of socialisation and norm transmission.

In addition Buskens (2001) contends that there has been some increased expectations on mothers to be 'good mothers', however this capacity has been reduced by the loss of traditional community. Buskens (2001) states that '[m]others are thus attempting to carry out rigorous schedules of attached



mothering in an increasingly fragmented and unsupportive social context'. She notes that in pre-modern times children tended to be raised by extended families, closely aligned with the carrying out of a range of subsistence oriented tasks.

A third point about the weakness of community in influencing norms is the extent to which they may lack a specific purpose to mobilise and work together, and a lack of administrative capacity. Communities generally tend not to mobilise around an explicit purpose of satisfying socio-economic needs within society. While they may be instinctively drawn together by a commitment towards shared goals, particularly in times of crises, this tends not to be accompanied by 'deliberate and deliberated commitment' to these goals (Adler and Heckscher 2005). Families tend to focus on the immediate basic needs of the members of the family. Common goals and values do not necessarily occur automatically in communities, 'shared work' is often needed to develop shared values. Genuine dialogue among differentiated groups is also called for by Habermas (in Adler and Heckscher 2005) to progress towards common values. Relatedly, Ronfeldt (1993) notes that a weakness of communities is their administrative capacity. Zakocs and Guckenberger (2007) identify organisational capacity as the primary vehicle for building community capacity as compared to individual capacity and network capacity. Facilitating access to greater resources, which is a problem for many communities, is one advantage of greater organisational capacity.

These three forms of community weakness that reduce the effectiveness of communities to influence norms contribute to increased incidences of negative exchange. In turn individuals will then often only contribute beyond the small group if it can be more or less guaranteed that they will not be adversely affected by negative exchange. In other words, beyond our small group contractual exchange will be relied on instead of reciprocity.

However the literature does point to positive trends with the potential to address some elements of community weakness, and of the decline thesis, as will now be discussed.

### Positive trends towards cosmopolitan, sustainable communities

The literature identifies a number of trends counteracting the negative view of the capacity of modern forms of communities. Firstly addressing the decline thesis is

the self-correction thesis: that decline leads to increased costs, and since these increased costs eventually threaten economic growth, policy begins to change to address the decline (Jenson, 2004). In part a discourse of politics of community relates to the increasing awareness of the rising costs of community failure (Mooney et al., 2000), alongside awareness of market and state failure (Streeck, 2011).

The 'politics of community' although in part involving negative connotations, also puts the spotlight on communities as a vehicle for achieving societal goals. Increased recognition that the prevention of socioecological problems is generally more cost effective than addressing them after they occur is part of the motivation for encouraging increased participation of those 'at the coal face'.

An integral element of the politics of community however is that governments appear to be attempting in late modernity to reconstruct community as the means by which the stability necessary for economic growth can occur (O'Hara, 2004). Authors such as Lake and Newman (2002) highlight that processes such as decentralisation have promoted the growth of the community as a mode of organisation to act as a 'shadow state'. The community is increasingly taking on both social and material service delivery, partly by push factors and partly pull factors. The impetus to provide for basic needs provides a strong motivation to organise to satisfy these needs in a climate of a failure of the market and the state, to ensure basic need provision for increasing numbers of people<sup>61</sup>. Carnoy (2001) concurs in stating that 'in times of transition, family and community are called on to bear the greatest responsibility for preserving social cohesion' (p 305). These are some of the pull factors. The push factors mainly derive from the state seeking in part to address budget shortfalls by attempting to persuade communities to undertake some of the state's traditional responsibilities. The related 'commodification of community' thesis (Popenoe, 2012) rests on the premise that while communities are increasingly taking on or being asked to take on these roles, the resources are also to some extent expected to come from within the community, rather than the state redistributing adequate levels of resources to communities (Fremeaux, 2005). Lending support to the

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<sup>61</sup> This can be linked to Polanyi's (2005) double movement thesis of self-protection efforts arising from the undermining of land, labour and money.

commodification of community possibility, O'Hara (2004) suggests that families and communities may be seen as a new 'structure of accumulation', able to keep economic growth going, in part to maintain a compliant polity.

Two final trends which can impact positively on the capacity of communities to enforce norms will briefly be mentioned: that of the rise of the knowledge economy, and advances in information and communication technologies. A significant trend which is proposed as increasing the importance of the norm of generalised reciprocity is of the rise of the knowledge economy. Adler (2001) in particular points to the consequences of the trend for modern economies to become more knowledge-intensive. Command and control, he notes, is not effective when tasks are non-routine; creative collaboration cannot be commanded. And since knowledge is a public good, markets fail to optimise the production and allocation of knowledge. Adler (2001) concludes that the trust emanating from the community mode of organising is already becoming increasingly required and will continue to be required in facilitating production in knowledge-intensive environments. For Adler (2001), community is based on confidence in the goodwill of others, whereby this goodwill allows a larger scope of knowledge generation and sharing.

The change from government to governance is an additional sign of increased possibilities of communities having a larger role in societal organisation. Esmark (2001) for example notes the fundamental thesis of governance is that governments are increasingly using new forms of reflexive and network-based steering to complement the conventional tools of command and control. One important implication of these trends relates to a possible opportunity for communities to become more involved in decision making (Murtagh and Goggin 2015).

A final trend identified as having a positive effect on the capacity of communities relates to the increased availability and use of information and communication technologies (ICT)<sup>62</sup>. A major significance of these technologies is their capacity to promote voluntary collective action and increased connectedness outside the

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<sup>62</sup> Note however the problem of the 'digital divide', where those who lack digital skills or access to digital devices are increasingly disadvantaged (for example see Rheingold 2002).

market and state (Castells, 1996). As Fulk and Steinfield (Fulk and Steinfield, 1990) contend, '[c]ommunications networks are an attempt to operationalise the ways in which the whole is indeed greater than the sum of its parts' (p 151). It is recognised that these may be weak connections rather than strong, and that conversely ICT may decrease place-based community, while increasing non-place-based community (Shirky, 2008). However certainly it seems that ICT can and is playing a large role in increasing the capacity of people to connect within communities, and to connect with other communities (Garson, 1995). Shirky (2008) for example notes that ICT brings the cost of communication to virtually zero (apart from the cost of the hardware). Certainly for one of the case studies in particular being analysed in this dissertation of community currency projects, ICT has vastly increased their potential to facilitate people connecting via the internet. Likewise for the other case study of community supported agriculture, information can be much more easily shared using the many ICT tools that are now available.

These trends are contributing to new visions of contemporary forms of communities with enhanced capacities for fostering sustainability norms, as will now be discussed.

### New conceptualisations of community

Recent idealistic conceptualisations of community include terms such as collaborative (Adler and Heckscher, 2005), sustainable (Goldstein, 2006), smart (Krebs and Holley, 2006), discourse (Swales, 1990), and discursive communities (Meppem, 2000). One conceptualisation from the literature that is particularly relevant here is of 'collaborative community' (Adler and Heckscher, 2005). Adler and Heckscher (2005) suggests that a recent 'yearning for community' is nostalgic and unrealistic, but instead proposes that a new modern form of community is emerging. Adler and Heckscher point to problems in the community mode of organisation of the promotion of 'stifling' ties, in terms of too many strong ties and insufficient weak ties, whereas on the other hand the market and state have promoted alienation as a result of failing to promote sufficient strong ties. Collaborative communities in contrast balance the two - in particular by being based on value-rationality (Adler and Heckscher, 2005). Collaborative community

for Adler and Heckscher (2005) is above all about having a deliberate and deliberated commitment to shared ends. A further emphasis is placed on balancing individuality and the collective, for which having a shared purpose is vital. This purpose, Adler and Heckscher (2005) note, must be a subject of widespread discussion. The nature of this discussion can be highly conflictual and thus the greatest challenge for collaborative community is 'finding ways to debate core orientations while still working together' (Adler and Heckscher, 2005; p 20).

Adler and Heckscher (2005) note that the scientific community, as an example of a collaborative community, provides a model from which 'institutional entrepreneurs' could learn. They imply that the scientific community operates predominantly via generalised reciprocity, where individuals frequently contribute without requiring direct compensation. Scientists also engage in substantial connecting with others in different localities and increasingly different disciplines, in other words connect across difference. In similar work, Stevenson (2002) refers to 'communities of the future' as capable of making broad links to share resources and ideas, simultaneously honouring difference and open exchange.

More broadly Glickman and Servon (2003) point to an increase in 'community development corporations' (CDC) which attempt to deal with 'systemic, structural problems', which have become too complex for governments to manage by themselves. CDCs are intermediaries between the community and government, drawing on both to strengthen local capacities particularly in disadvantaged areas.

A further version of an adaptive community concept is that of 'coalition community' posed by Zakocs and Guckenberger (2007). Their use of this concept relates in particular to health, where community and the state partner in health initiatives, aiming specifically at building community capacity.

All these visions of how communities could develop are normative conceptions of how communities can have greater influence on societal directions and hence sustainability. It is contended however that even if these ideal forms of communities could be achieved, community socioeconomic initiatives could still provide benefits in fostering sustainability norms. This is the topic of the next section.

## Community socioeconomic initiatives

This dissertation is concerned with the fostering of sustainability norms, for which reciprocity, equity, efficiency and deliberation are identified as four current priorities. When considering whether communities have the direct capacity to foster these norms, one view from the above analysis is that communities by themselves may lack sufficient capacity in this respect. A crucial factor regarding sustainability norms is that they tend to be non-mainstream, whereas the ‘average’ community would tend to be dominated by mainstream norms.

Therefore although communities feature reliance on generalised reciprocity, they are much less likely to promote norms of equity, efficiency and deliberation. Communities are identified here as having potential to influence norms via social sanctioning. However where specific non-mainstream norms are identified as important, there needs to be leadership and structures to specifically promote these norms.

I contend that community socioeconomic initiatives can provide the leadership and structures to supplement the natural social sanctioning capacity that exists in communities. Community socioeconomic initiatives are defined as members of a place-based community cooperating together on a non-profit basis to satisfy a basic need, as defined by the community. The stipulation of being non-profit refers to the predominant use of generalised reciprocity as opposed to market exchange, but does include non-profit forms of mere exchange.

The crucial aspect of CSIs is their purpose and aims. As Gurstein (2000) notes, often in modern societies, particularly urban dwellers do not see communities as important to everyday life. CSIs however can provide the reason for forming strong communities, via its particular aims, relating to the satisfaction of one or more socioeconomic needs.

The concept of CSI draws on a number of other similar ideas. Four are mentioned here: Seyfang and Smith (2007) concept of grassroots innovations, Kenny’s (2003) activist community organisations, Kusenbach’s (2006) neighbourhood associations, and Peredo and Chrisman’s (2006) community-based enterprises. These all highlight the mobilisation of community around a specific purpose.

Seyfang and Smith's (2007) work is exemplary in highlighting the mobilisation of communities towards addressing unmet needs. They contend that while ideology is also a driver of grassroots innovations, 'meeting social (and environmental) needs is the primary function' (p 591). A major element of CSIs is that, particularly where there is market failure, communities are frequently motivated to mobilise towards ensuring especially important needs are provided within the community.

A very basic typology of CSIs consists of weak and strong versions. CSIs exist on a spectrum in the weak version from a low level of engagement in market and state relationships, and a focus on needs that are not widely considered as important by the community, to a relatively high level of market-state engagement which focuses on needs considered very important by the community in the strong version. The intention is not to portray the weak version as necessarily of a lesser value than strong versions, particularly since weak versions may have much greater capacity to engage people in re-valuing social relations via low key activities. In weak versions, the value of CSIs arises mainly from their ability to increase community connections, and can be useful in communities which experience lower levels of norms of reciprocity. Strong CSIs are more able to access external resources, even though they may be less successful in attracting a diversity of members. It is contended that both have valuable but somewhat different roles. One essential element of both forms of CSIs is that since they are non-profit, they can help ameliorate mainstream norms related to profit seeking. A second is that since they are based on a specific purpose, this purpose can act to increase motivation to participate in a CSI.

Examples of CSIs with a non-systematic ordering from weak to strong versions is: walking groups, self-help groups, community gardens, art and craft groups, environmental/sustainability groups, men's/community sheds, alternative education, health initiatives, University of the Third Age/school for seniors, community food security initiatives, community energy, community currencies, community banks, social enterprise, social financing, cohousing, and intentional communities<sup>63</sup> (Questenberry, 1996). The commonality of these activities is that

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<sup>63</sup> Intentional communities, often called eco-villages, are groups of people living cooperatively, committed to particular social and/or ecological values and goals (see Questenberry 1996).

they each have a specific defined purpose, they are non-profit, and are largely based on volunteer contributions.

One notable feature of this list is that on the one hand many of the activities are based on things that people tend to be internally motivated to do, because they enjoy the activity. Of course the assumption is implicit that people only volunteer for activities they enjoy doing (Stebbins, 2009), whereby the type of activity therefore becomes vital, hence some types of activities will be more successful in attracting volunteers than others. At the same time there is perhaps a recent increase of willingness to volunteer in areas which traditionally failed to attract volunteers, for example relating to social financing.

At least two points can be made relating to weaknesses of the capacity of CSI to foster sustainability norms. The first is the tendency of CSIs to be dominated by those in higher income groups. This was mentioned by a number of authors in the literature on community initiatives (Allen and Sachs, 1993). However since CSIs do require a certain amount of financing, the greater material resources this group brings might in some cases be a determining factor in establishing a CSI. On the other hand, the general absence of low income participants in CSIs is an ongoing challenge to be addressed.

This relates to a second weakness of CSIs noted by Lake and Newman (2002) via their concept of 'differential citizenship'. They highlight differential access to 'shadow-state citizenship', whereby community initiatives will tend to arise as a result of higher income individuals joining together in a particular community, which may or may not coincide with a community which has a severe level of dysfunction and therefore greater needs. This is where government assistance may be required to use planning to ensure that communities with the greatest needs are assisted.

The research questions for this research centre on this concept of CSIs. The remainder of this chapter will outline the conceptual framework used to analyse the key question of the potential of CSIs to foster sustainability norms. The sections comprise of firstly highlighting the interdisciplinarity nature of sustainability and hence of the conceptual framework, socioeconomics as the main theoretical framework, post-normal science as assisting an understanding of the



immediate sustainability challenges, and finally a virtuous circle theory of change underpinning the conceptual framework.

### The interdisciplinarity nature of sustainability

Sustainability and socioeconomics both involve the crossing of disciplinary boundaries to address 'messy' and 'wicked' problems (Abey Suriya and Mitchell 2007). Abey Suriya and Mitchell (2007) note Myrdal's contention that '[t]here are no 'economic', 'sociological', or 'psychological' problems, but just problems, and they are all complex' (p 3). They also cite Max-Neef's argument that transdisciplinarity requires collaboration and coordination of knowledges from four types of disciplinary knowledge: the values disciplines (such as philosophy and ethics), normative disciplines (including planning, politics and law), pragmatic disciplines (for example engineering and commerce) and empirical disciplines (such as ecology, physics and chemistry) (in Abey Suriya and Mitchell 2007).

Yoshikawa (2008) uses the term 'synthesiology' to refer to a 'theory of integration of scientific and technological knowledge from different disciplines with the needs of society' (p 169). He further states that:

[a]s we continue to construct an increasingly artefactual environment for ourselves ..., little thought has been given to the coherence or compatibility of knowledge between different scientific disciplines. As a result, incompatibilities and contradictions have arisen within that environment, and, most ominously, between it and the surrounding natural environment. These contradictions have caused environmental degradation on a global scale and now threaten the very survival of humanity' (p 169).

Contradictions is one of the main themes of the next component of the conceptual framework, of post normal science, which will now be discussed.

### Post normal science

For Frame and Brown (2008), post-normal science is in part a response to inherent uncertainties, the inevitable value-based nature of science, and the new risk society (Beck and Levy, 2013), leading to calls for a more participative and ideologically open approach to knowledge-making. The very term 'post-normal' indicates that the 'normal' in one respect is no longer helpful in thinking about the future. Resource constraints are one 'new normal' which is of such fundamental importance to the human condition (Robertson and Choi, 2010), where over history there has been a focus on eliminating resource constraints.

For Sardar (2015):

[i]n postnormal analysis, we take normal to be that which is frequently encountered: what is accepted as the dominant way of being, doing and knowing, conventionally seen as the standard, dictated by convention and tradition, backed by disciplinary structures and scholarship and what we are able to predict and control. The normal is thus located in the well established modes of thought and behaviour: modernity, postmodernism, predatory capitalism, market fundamentalism, hierarchical structures of society, institutions and organisations, standard scientific procedures, recognised academic disciplines such as economics and political science as well as disciplinary structures, top down politics, broken government, polluting industries, runaway technology, marginalisation of the vast swathes of humanity, xenophobia, racism and misogyny, unjust social and political policies, scientism, and everything else that has shaped and defined the 'modern world' (p 27)

Sardar (2015) then contends that underlying post-normality are networks, complexity, positive feedback, and contradictions. For this dissertation, unsustainability norms are integral to post-normality, which derive from for example positive feedback (in terms of cumulative advantage) and systemic socioeconomic contradictions. The current post-normal period can be seen as having at least three trends that have enormous implications for our survival and thriving. The three trends are firstly current material security, in terms of levels of production sufficient to satisfy needs at a global levels (Chernomas, 1984). One important implication is the removal of the justification for inequality, where inequality has been purportedly necessary to maximise economic growth (Angle, 1976). The second is worsening employment scarcity, where automation is increasingly replacing labour (Rifkin, 2004), and insufficient demand is further reducing employment (that is, via insufficient purchasing power) by many to sufficiently satisfy their material needs (Klitgaard, 2010). The third trend is the possibility predicted by many of looming resource scarcity (Galbraith, 2014)<sup>64</sup>.

One contradiction from these trends is the emerging co-existence of current production sufficiency, alongside the necessity to reduce production to mitigate climate change and other environmental problems, and/or actual looming resource scarcity. Another aspect of post-normality is the contradiction between current

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<sup>64</sup> It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to investigate the extent to which the elimination of all waste, together with improvements in efficiency and 'deflation of wants' may address resource scarcity problems.

time stress or time poverty, and the opportunity emerging of time abundance arising from increasing levels of unemployment. This creates the opportunity of (re)converting to increased leisure time ('time abundance not wealth abundance), which is necessary for the building of community and deliberative processes. It is contended that the voluntarism intrinsic to communities is a key aspect of these challenges. However it is the discipline of socioeconomics which in turn is integral to conceptualisations of community which will now be discussed.

### Socioeconomics - recognising the dependence of the economic on the social

In terms of drawing on multiple understandings, firstly, socioeconomics itself, according to Etzioni (2002) is interdisciplinary, where he states that:

socioeconomics, by definition, is an interstitial discipline ...[t]he term 'socio' in socio-economics does not stand for sociology; it includes major segments of psychology and anthropology, history, and political science--the whole complex of disciplines that examine the relationships between society and the economy (p 40).

Hediger (2000) highlights a foundation of socioeconomics whereby the social system provides functions necessary for the productivity of the economic system. These functions are performed in households and communities. Likewise Adger (2003) challenges the view that social relations are a constraint on economic activity, contending conversely that social relations are the very foundation of the economy. Market exchange cannot adequately address the full range of socioeconomic needs required for sustainability, at the least the incompleteness of contracts is one barrier.

A fundamental element of socioeconomics is the recognition that humans have both material needs, for food, shelter, transport and so on, and non-material needs, such as positive social relations, autonomy and competence (Deci and Ryan, 2008).<sup>65</sup> Positive social relations is related to taking account of the needs of others in the production, distribution and consumption of material goods and services, in other words, conforming to the norm of reciprocity. Etzioni (2008) emphasises the 'tension between the individual (and their rights) and the common good (and hence one's social responsibilities) and that a good society seeks a carefully crafted

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<sup>65</sup> Deci and Ryan (2008) have published a considerable amount of work proposing relatedness, autonomy and competence as basic human needs which negatively impact mental health if not satisfied.

balance between the two, relying as much as possible on moral suasion and not on power'.<sup>66</sup> Importantly the meeting of material and non-material needs implies a concern with equity. According to Hollingsworth (2005), socioeconomics does include a concern for equity and redistribution, specifically that socioeconomics has an important role in 'more equally distributed life chances and opportunities' (p 15).

The contention here is that socioeconomics has particular significance for sustainability particularly when sustainability is viewed as a matter of progressing towards wellbeing or quality of life. The latter is related to the extent that basic material (economic) and non-material (social) needs are met. Socioeconomics highlights the necessity of balancing specialisation and division of labour and the distributional inequality that results, and preserving enough generalised reciprocity which underpins any society dependent on specialisation. Without a basic level of reciprocity, this interdependence cannot be sustained.

Socioeconomics also involves the concept of two challenges of human survival being firstly the economic concern of the meeting of material needs via the production, distribution and consumption of material goods (Beckert and Streeck, 2008). Secondly we also have non-material needs which can be called basic needs, in terms of the generation of pathology if they are not satisfied (Douglas et al., 1998). Social contact and interaction is frequently cited as one such need (Etzioni, 1968). The corollary is that since we are an interdependent species, the opportunity arises of negative exchange (obtaining something without sufficient payment in return), and hence the need to guard against it becoming a dominant norm. Generalised reciprocity is identified here as the means by which negative exchange can be minimised. Exchange is defined as the act of giving one thing and receiving another thing in return (Merriam-Webster 2015). It is critical to both survival and thriving, whereby generalised reciprocity, in other words the motivation to give without being unduly concerned about receiving, is the very basis of

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<sup>66</sup> There is an emerging literature on 'dual motive theory' of the co-existing (but varying) levels of self-interest on the one hand and concern for the interests of others on the other hand. See Levine (2006) and Lynne (2006).

human civilisation. The alternative, of requiring a contract to ensure a return benefit, is costly and often ineffective (Rao, 2003).

The interstitial discipline of socioeconomics (Etzioni, 2002) appears to come the closest to addressing the two issues of gaining benefits from exchange while controlling negative exchange. It retains the relevance of economics for sustainability, but builds on a purely economics perspective to better account for the reality of the issues of the production, distribution and consumption of material goods, and to recognise the influence of non-material needs on social, economic and environmental sustainability.

The literature identifies three assumptions of socioeconomics which differ from the assumptions of neoclassical economics. These are firstly that the economy is contained within the social system, in other words that not all, indeed ultimately only quite a limited proportion, of exchange can be conducted as market exchange. Particularly when communication is considered as a vital form of reciprocal exchange (Vaughan, 1997), it can be seen in one sense that generalised reciprocity is actually the dominant form of facilitating interdependence. Gibson-Graham (1996) highlight the fact that 30 to 50% of 'economic' activity is unpaid household labour, which is essential for any production to occur. Adding informal economic production on the one hand, and very intangible forms of exchange on the other hand, particularly communication, illustrates the importance of non-market, formal exchange. Williams and Windebank (2003) also point out that there are significant amounts of 'non-exchanged work, non-monetized exchange and non-profit-motivated monetary exchange' (which they also call 'gift-giving, voluntarism and unpaid reciprocity') that occur at least in Europe, counteracting the 'capitalocentric' (Gibson-Graham 1996) view of the total dominance of market exchange.

Secondly the economy is not self-regulating, rather market exchange requires active regulation. Muller-Armack (1978) for example state that the market is not capable of dealing with interdependence and hence cannot integrate society: in other words it cannot promote the norms required for societies to operate. This accords with the commonly quoted foundational assumption of socioeconomics as Etzioni (2002) notes, that the economy is a sub-system of the societal system. One

interpretation here is an acknowledgement that generalised reciprocity always has and continues necessarily to precede and underpin market exchange. This is related to the third socioeconomic assumption which Etzioni (2000) in particular highlights, that of the conflict between own interest and other interest.

For this dissertation the many interpretations of socioeconomics can be narrowed to a focus on the co-existence of social and economic exchange. This is exemplified by Clark and Mills (2012) work on communal and exchange relationships. Communal relationships are where no explicit accounting occurs of benefits given and received, based on the special responsibility the donors perceive they have for recipients. When individuals feel no special responsibility for others, exchange relationships are required for exchange to take place, where the donor explicitly expects a benefit in return for provisioning others. Since modern societies are based on interdependence between both those we feel a special responsibility to and those we don't, both communal and exchange relationships are evident in most societies. However an element of responsibility for the welfare of others reduces transaction costs even of exchange between strangers.

A number of concepts can be incorporated under the umbrella of socioeconomics. One of particular relevance for this dissertation is that of associative economics. As Bloom (2009) notes, mutuality, in one sense, beneficial exchange is the core concept of associative economics, whereby market exchange is guided by a balancing of self and other interest, rather than a focus on maximising one's own gains from exchange.

The final element in the conceptual framework is a theory of change based on the 'virtuous circle' theory of Stutz (2006), as the subject of the next section. This theory integrates micro level change and collective action, with macro level institutionalisation.

### Virtuous circle theory of change

Stutz (2006) provides a theory of change by which communities and CSIs are identified as important to generating large scale change towards sustainability. This supports the idea that community socioeconomic initiatives can foster a sufficient level of change of mainstream norms to sustainability norms. For Stutz,

the 'virtuous circle' involves equitable and sustainable progress both preceding and resulting from gradual improvements in wellbeing. Bruni (2008) contributes the following view that implies individuals motivated by generalised reciprocity are an important (initial) aspect of this theory of change, in stating (note his use of the term unconditional, instead of generalised reciprocity):

this unconditional logic often lies at the heart of critical cultural changes, in which the existence of an even small group of people with high intrinsic motivation unleash revolutions and cultural changes spreading to the entire population ... The founders of cultural, civil or religious movements are normally subjects with high intrinsic motivation ... capable of activating unprecedented behaviours when, by definition, nobody is yet practicing them; if the founders followed conditional logics with their actions they could hardly be able to give rise to truly original realities and to introduce momentous turns (p 58).

The concept of sustainable leadership builds on this idea of individuals motivated to achieve change creating groups who directly or indirectly achieve progress towards the equitable and efficient satisfaction of socioeconomic needs. As Stutz (2006) states, the major hurdle is then building a large, strong movement that can effectively foster policy change, where in turn one main challenge is overcoming resistance to perceptions of identities becoming subsumed by the process of integrating with other groups. Therefore the next crucial step in the virtuous circle is these groups forming coalitions, with multiple benefits including an increase of capacity to apply pressure for policy change. These groups include the more ideologically motivated social movements and the more social practice and provisioning orientated community socioeconomic initiatives. The basic argument is that momentum can be generated by leadership and mobilisation related to well-being, leading initially to community based organisations focused on those issues. By these groups or organisations joining together, value change can firstly be more effectively promoted, and secondly political systems can be changed when sufficient numbers of people apply pressure for change.

Stutz (2006) notes that the underlying argument for engagement in sustainability can be effectively based on self-interest, interest in improving one's own wellbeing. The provision of role models that others can imitate can be effective in fostering norm change. The second vital element is connections between groups, to share knowledge and build commitment to similar values and aims. As

Granovetter (2005) states, weak ties across communities rather than within communities are an important source of new information. This can then build a movement strong enough to force changes in policy by firstly an increased likelihood of those directly committed towards sustainability as wellbeing standing for parliamentary positions, and secondly to generate the numbers to vote for those advocating for sustainable wellbeing.

The final element of the circle reflects that policies such as bans on advertising targeting children, family friendly work policies, a more progressive tax structure, or a guaranteed minimum income, can promote the pursuit of well-being (Stutz 2013). Deliberation is an important vehicle for the development of these policies, both to improve policy development itself, and to gain greater commitment by a sense of ownership created by participation

## Conclusion

The major argument of this dissertation is that the addressing of the problems of firstly establishing communities and secondly maintaining 'strong' communities that are at the heart of sustainability. A strong community can aid the maintenance of an enabling state, assist with the regulation of 'small markets', and above all assist with fostering sustainability norms. This chapter put forward the argument that place-based communities are vital for sustainability for three main reasons. The first relates to motivation and incentives, that it is in our interests to look after our local area environmentally, socially, and perhaps increasingly in an economic sense. The second reason is that it is more efficient in terms of using less resources to look after the place we live in, rather than focusing on looking after places that are distant. Thirdly, place-based communities in one respect are the most efficient means of social sanctioning, and in turn social sanctioning has significant advantages for fostering norms. The unique capacity for communities to monitor and enforce rules and regulations is highlighted here as providing the potential at least for communities to make an effective contribution to societal organisation.

However the weaknesses of communities, and the extent that people currently engage in relationships based on face to face, ongoing regular interaction to an insufficient extent to facilitate social sanctioning points to the need to address



these weaknesses. There are two main elements of the literature that are relevant to assessing the effectiveness of community as a mode of organisation. The first is the extent to which it can attract people voluntarily to engage in community. Community socioeconomic initiatives can provide the motivation for people to volunteer in initiatives which have specific purposes. The second is the capacity of communities to organise its members, for which sustainability, leadership and purposeful social interaction are highlighted as important aspects integral to CSIs. If as the sustainability literature indicates, people's needs will have to be satisfied on a more local level in the future (Hopkins, 2008), the problem of a lack of commitment to community will have to be addressed. To some extent the imperative to reduce ecological footprints and adopt more local ways of living will provide an effective remedy to the current lack of community - people in other words will find more motivation to 'get to know their neighbours'. Currently there is a general perception of a lack of such a need, and hence the motivation to be committed to community often does not exist. CSIs have the capacity to provide the reason for people to interact in specific places towards a common goal, and thereby increase the capacity of communities to influence norms.

## 4. Methodology and methods

### Introduction

Chapter three discussed the potential of communities and CSIs to foster sustainability, and outlined the conceptual framework which was used to guide the research. To reiterate the research questions, they are as follows:

- Which social norms are most relevant to fostering sustainability?
- How in practice do CSIs foster sustainability norms?
- Do different CSIs differ in their capacity to foster sustainability norms?

This chapter outlines the methodology and methods used to analyse the overall research question of the potential of community socioeconomic initiatives to foster sustainability norms. This chapter has two main aims: to make the underlying theoretical assumptions explicit, and to outline the specific methodology used for this research.

It is hypothesised that an important challenge in progressing towards sustainability, given our increasingly interdependent way of life, amounts to a socioeconomic challenge. My focus is on sustainability as thriving, which in turn is contributed to by the meeting of both material and non-material needs for all. The corollary is that socioeconomics includes re-balancing between the economic and the social: between material provisioning via specialisation and division of labour on the one hand, and controlling negative exchange and satisfying the need for belonging and mutual recognition of worth on the other.

Reciprocity, equity, efficiency and deliberation are identified as four norms likely to enhance every individual's opportunity to thrive via meeting material and nonmaterial needs. A corollary is in recognising that the amount of resources used in satisfying material needs is related to how well we satisfy non-material needs. As Etzioni (1988) states, the greater the level of morality (reciprocity), the lower the transaction costs.

Neoclassical economics denies generalised reciprocity or anything that may be deemed non self-serving as a human motivation of any significance (Lynch, 2008). Socioeconomics however says that 'moral commitments' or reciprocity is a vital

factor in determining how well we meet our material needs (Etzioni 2008). Neoclassical economics assumes that market exchange is the basis of a self-regulating market which achieves equilibrium by individuals acting self-interestedly (Belousek, 2010). Socioeconomics highlights, however, that the free market economy is not self-regulating, and suggests that communities have an important role to play in facilitating beneficial exchange (Etzioni 2008).

One important difference between economics and socioeconomics is that the former ignores interdependence and for the latter it is crucial. As an interdependent species, exchange is a vital concept of our survival and thriving, in other words it is fundamental to our existence (Nettle and Dunbar, 1997). Exchange is a core concept for sustainability firstly since it is how goods and services are exchanged that impacts on the satisfaction of both our material and non-material needs. In particular, the lower the level of the norm of generalised reciprocity, the greater the costs, in terms of a reliance instead on the more costly market (contractual) exchange. Secondly, exchange is the process by which we hold each other accountable for avoiding negative exchange, of not taking without contributing.

This chapter consists of the following sections. Firstly the methodology and methods are outlined, the justification of the two case studies is given, then the two on-ground case studies are presented. The final section provides the conclusion to the chapter.

### [Methodology and methods - the details](#)

I use a naturalist, ethnographic approach which aims to study the culture (in terms of the norms that are prevalent) of a natural setting. As Wadsworth and Hargeaves (2002) state, ‘the social world depends on the exchange and communication of interpretations about what is going on. These are multiple and may even be conflicting. Furthermore the researcher cannot remain outside the world’ (no pg).

More specifically, the methodology used for this dissertation was comparative case study research. Case study research allows an in-depth study of a particular case (Eisenhardt 1989), while investigating multiple cases allows comparing and contrasting to assist in understanding the relevant variables affecting both. Comparative case study analysis was chosen as the methodology due primarily to

the belief in the importance of combining theory and practice. Eisenhardt (1989) notes that case study research is based on understanding the dynamics of a single setting. It allows in-depth analysis of variables and their inter-relationships. Comparative case study analysis goes further to facilitate a greater understanding of the uniqueness of each case, and how they differ from each other. This involved choosing two case studies of community socioeconomic exchange initiatives (CSIs) to analyse their potential to foster sustainability norms. The three methods used to analyse the cases studies was a literature review, participant observation and semi-structured interviews.

### Literature review

The literature was sourced from not only monographs and journal papers, but also newspaper articles, the grey literature and electronic media. This literature covered a range of disciplines, including management and organisation science, sustainability science, sociology and economic literature. The grey literature of unpublished information included the websites of community initiatives. Reviewing the literature on both types of the case studies, and on community organising more generally substantially added to my understanding of the potential of CSIs to foster sustainability norms. While there was somewhat of a lack of literature focussing on CSIs (which is part of the rationale for this research), there is an emerging literature linking increased democracy, environmental sustainability, social justice and localisation which identifies community initiatives as important to progress these goals.

### Participant observation

Being involved as a participant in examples of both of the case studies of community socio-economic initiatives allowed first-hand and in-depth analysis of the particular characteristics of both the CSIs. Participant observation is defined as 'the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day routine activities of participants in the researcher setting' (Schensul et al., 1999). My engagement with the case studies was less of a case of originally becoming involved in both on-ground initiatives specifically in order to study them, rather I became involved originally because of an interest in them as agents of change, and then decided to study them. Applying a researcher lens was invaluable for

critiquing their strengths and weaknesses. While participant observation may be critiqued as being too subjective, I found for example that a level of detachment could be achieved by the process of keeping field notes. I found this a powerful mechanism for reflexively stepping back and teasing out deeper understandings, for example about the interaction between the members and the structure imposed by the projects. This I found was a good way of avoiding going 'completely native' (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2010), of becoming so immersed as a participant and neglecting the role as an observer and researcher.

Bray et al. (2000) note that 'certain aspects of the human experience cannot be understood by conducting experiments and collecting data from other people. Rather, one must be authentically inside the experience to properly explore and understand it' (p 4). For DeWal and DeWal (2010), participant observation in terms of participating in the area being researched enhances ways of knowing and 'learning to see'.

The specific methods I used for participant observation were direct observation, collective discussions (both online and face to face), official document analysis, and the keeping of a journal. This diversity of methods allowed triangulation of the data, hence increased the robustness of the findings. As Maxwell (1996) notes, using a variety of methods reduces the problem of the limitations or systematic biases of a specific method. As well as being fully involved in the two Tasmanian CSIs, I also observed other CSA and LETS projects nationally and internationally. In addition I attended both national and international meetings and conferences which gave me insight into the discourse on higher level organising of these CSIs.

## Interviews

Two sets of interview data were drawn on for this research. The first was conducted specifically for the research, the second set of interviews was conducted for another purpose but was drawn on for this research. The first set of interviews was conducted with the aim of gaining an understanding of different ways of conceptualising sustainability. This included examining the level at which the interviewees perceived responsibility for sustainability exists. Three groups were targeted, academics, government representatives, and community initiative practitioners. The interviews were used to obtain background data to enable

refinement of the interview questions. The interview schedule is presented in Appendix A. Nevertheless there were some responses which helped frame the understanding of sustainability underlying the research. Twenty-two interviews were conducted, with the following table showing the number from each category. The interviewees were chosen firstly due to evidence of a strong publication record and/or strong interest in the particular topic area.

**Summary of interviews by topic, affiliation and location:**

*Topic area:*

General sustainability	8
General community engagement/community initiatives:	7
Community supported agriculture:	2
Community currency systems	2
Community renewable energy:	1
Participation/democracy	1
Other	1

*Affiliation*

Academic:	10
Government:	3
Activist/practitioners:	9

It is not assumed that each interviewee was only interested in the one specific topic, rather I have categorised them according to what I perceive is their main area of interest. I chose the category for each according to factors such as their publications and specific affiliation.

The second lot of interview data used for this dissertation was borrowed from interviews conducted in relation to the case study of Community Exchange Network Tasmania (CENTs). Funding was received from the Institute for Regional Development of the University of Tasmania in 2013 via a grant called the 'Cross Boundary Research Fund', designed to promote collaborative research in North-West Tasmania. The CENTs project was 'cross boundary' in two senses. Firstly it crossed boundaries between academic and non-academic (practitioner) spaces,

and secondly was inter-disciplinary. The intention was to evaluate the barriers and opportunities for CENTs, with a focus on how it might affect relationships based on trust. In part the technique of ‘most significant change’ was used to guide some of the interview questions (McDonald et al., 2009), which aims to elicit in the respondents view aspects that have had substantial impact on the respondent.

A general invitation was firstly sent to all CENTs members to participate in the interviews. This was followed up by specific invitations to ensure a diversity of interviewee’s was achieved. Two people were interviewed who had heard of CENTs but had chosen not to join. The criterion then was a mix of those who have high and lower rates of trading. Nine interviews were conducted in total. The interview schedule is presented in Appendix B. The interviews were conducted in July 2013.

### Justification of two case studies

The meeting of socioeconomic needs is carried out within different sectors of ‘the economy’. These sectors include health, education, energy, manufacturing, agri-food, entertainment, cultural activities, and finance. Of these sectors I focus on two within which community socio-economic initiatives appear to have particular potential to foster sustainability norms. These are the agri-food sector and the finance sector (by which exchange occurs). The initial justification for these two sectors are that they are basic to human survival and thriving. Furthermore with regards to levels of community provisioning, they have attracted relatively large community (or in other words, volunteer) interest. In addition, the current way that industrial agriculture relies on, and money is based on, relationships of market exchange are problematic. When any material good is used as a means of accumulating money, and when there are insufficient mechanisms of regulation to counteract the possibility of negative exchange, the undermining of planet and people tends to be a result (Etzioni, 2009). In the case of agriculture and the food sector, there has been significant separation of production and consumption, and the use of food for profit seeking (Friedmann, 1993). The corollary is that the quality of food, preservation of the environment and relationships between people tend to be compromised for the achievement of greater and greater productivity and seeking of economic security.

With regards to finance and markets, modern money can be seen to have evolved from one of its original main functions as facilitating exchange between strangers, to gaining capacity to become a tool for those who seek to use it for increases in material wealth (Hart, 2001). Three problematic characteristics of commodified money can be identified, that it is made artificially scarce, that it is created by bank-debt in effect out of nothing, in other words is fiat money, and it is interest-bearing (Greco, 2004). Ultimately some claim that if money was democratically controlled, it would avoid adverse effects on sustainable systems (Greco, 2004; Hart, 2001). These problems of industrial agriculture and non-democratically controlled money add to the rationale for choosing these two case studies.

The two specific case studies of CSIs chosen for this dissertation therefore are of community supported agriculture and local exchange trading systems. In addition to the unsustainability of the dominant mode of agri-food and finance systems, the main justification for the two case studies is that they are examples of strong CSIs in combining generalised reciprocity, balanced reciprocity and hybrid types of exchange (that still use an accounting mechanism to keep track of what has done what for whom, but do not use state controlled money). One consequence is the possibility of increased capacity to achieve greater scale, in part due to the way in which the two CSIs may appeal to some extent to mainstream norms, while attracting leadership committed to shifting mainstream norms towards sustainability norms.

Furthermore since both food and exchange are basic to the human condition, they can both elicit significant motivation, and therefore volunteer support. In fact drawing on Smith (2009) who notes that religion provides significant motivation owing to it satisfying deep basic needs, food, and currencies as providing a medium of exchange likewise satisfy deep basic needs. For Max-Neef (1992), they act as 'synergic satisfiers'; satisfying more than one need simultaneously. A third reason was that I have been closely involved in both types for some period of time, allowing me to use participant observation as a research method. As will now be discussed, participant observation facilitates the collection of quality data not obtainable by many other methods. The framework used to analyse the two case studies will now be discussed.



## Comparative framework

As discussed in chapter two, four sustainability norms were identified as priorities to balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. These were reciprocity, equity, efficiency and deliberation. For each of the norms, indicators were identified as a means of assessing the extent of the potential to foster sustainability norms. Table 1 shows the indicators identified for each norm, and the next section discusses the rationale for each indicator.

Table 1: Norms and indicators

Sustainability Norms	Indicators
1. Reciprocity	1.1 Volunteering
	1.2 Dominant exchange type
2. Equity	2.1 Redistribution
3. Efficiency	3.1 Localisation
	3.2 Dematerialisation
4. Deliberation	4.1 Purposeful social interaction
	4.2 Prosumption

## Indicators

The indicators of the ability of the CSIs to foster the four sustainability norms that were chosen were volunteering, dominant exchange type, redistribution, localisation, dematerialisation, purposeful social interaction and prosumption.

Volunteering was chosen as the indicator for the first sustainability norm of reciprocity. Volunteering is defined by Wilson and Musick (1999) as contributing time to helping others without expectation of any pay or other explicit benefits in return. For Stebbins (2009) the crucial aspect is ‘volunteers feel they are engaging in a leisure activity, which they have had the option to accept or reject on their own terms’ (p 155). Wilson and Musick (1999) also note that even though there is no explicit expectation of a reward, that ‘it is widely believed that helping others is as beneficial for the donor as it is for the recipient’ (p 141). They contend that research has shown that most people do believe that volunteering does give

benefits to the volunteer. Community, reciprocity and volunteering are to some extent inseparable concepts. Viewing volunteering as 'freely offering to do something', and 'work without being paid' captures the defining essence of generalised reciprocity used in this dissertation. This is highly analogous to reciprocity, of contributing without thought of return, but nevertheless commonly receiving a benefit in return.

The second indicator of the potential of CSIs to promote the norm of reciprocity is the dominant type of exchange used. The basic alternatives (setting aside negative exchange) are reciprocal exchange, market exchange, and/or a hybrid of the two. The more that reciprocal exchange is used, and hybrid forms of exchange rather than market exchange, the more reciprocity will be promoted.

The second norm of equity was defined as the maintenance of minimum and maximum levels of material consumption, such that all are more likely to be able to meet their basic needs. The indicator chosen for the norm of equity was redistribution. This at least in theory if it involves resources being re-allocated from those who have more than sufficiency to those who have less would progress towards consumption being above a minimum level but below a maximum level. A fairly broad definition of redistribution was used, in terms any process which reduces inequalities in the distribution of resources.

Efficiency was defined as minimising inputs into the production and distribution of goods and services, in other words, minimising inputs for a given amount of satisfaction. To assist gauging the potential of CSIs to foster the norm of efficiency, localisation was used as the first indicator. It is assumed here for reasons explained in chapter three that localisation has the potential to reduce the amount of resources used for a given amount of output. The second indicator chosen of efficiency was dematerialisation. Voet et al. (2004) define dematerialisation as a decrease of the throughput of materials in human societies. I interpret it as aiming to cover other ways apart from localisation that resource use inputs into the production of goods and services towards the satisfaction of

basic needs can be minimised. An example is organic agriculture, which can reduce resource inputs such as herbicides and pesticides<sup>67</sup>.

The first indicator of the fourth norm of deliberation is purposeful social interaction. People need to interact to engage in careful discussion, and having a purpose for the interaction tends to increase the motivation to be engaged in the activity. The second indicator of the potential of CSIs to foster the norm of deliberation is prosumption. The term prosumer comes from Alvin Toffler, as cited by Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010). The latter authors contend there are reasons to call the current stage of capitalism prosumer capitalism, whereby prosumption refers to the co-existence of both production and consumption rather than a focus of one or the other.<sup>68</sup> It is contended that when people have a broader role than just consumption, in terms of some involvement in production as well, they may have greater capacity to engage in deliberation. This in part draws on the idea that until an individual engages in an activity, knowledge in relation to the activity will be limited. This draws on the literature on experiential learning (Weil and McGill, 1989).

Localisation (which includes an element of prosumption) can be seen as the ultimate means of CSI fostering sustainability norms. Localisation firstly promotes face to face relationships integral to localisation as the very basis of reciprocity. Secondly people are less likely to treat others inequitably when they have face to face relationships, in other words, when there is direct feedback about the negative effects of inequity. Thirdly localisation can facilitate dematerialisation, owing to reduced need for travel of goods and people, reduced packaging, growing of food using ecological techniques assisted by direct ecological feedback and so on.<sup>69</sup> Lastly deliberation works best when based on face to face relationships.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Organic agriculture does tend to use higher labour inputs, but can reduce negative side effects or externalities for example from reduced pesticides and herbicides.

<sup>68</sup> Ritzer and Jurgenson also state that earlier forms of capitalism were characterised by prosumption, and that the current return to prosumption there are trends towards an increase in unpaid work, offering products for free, and a 'new abundance' to replace scarcity.

<sup>69</sup> It is important to note again the lack of consensus on the extent to which localisation can dematerialise production.

<sup>70</sup> This is at least verified by work on comparing computer mediated communication versus face to face communication: for example see Rice (1994).

If one challenge of deliberation is that in the modern era people have become deskilled, as claimed by Weil and McGill (1989), this is likely to have a negative impact on the capacity to deliberate. Relatedly Carpini et al (2004) point to possibilities that a majority of citizens lack the skills and/or opportunities to deliberate effectively. Participation in productive activities is likely to increase knowledge and understanding (Weil and McGill, 1989). The quality of deliberation is increased by the experience one has with the particular topic - experience mainly as a consumer can give a narrow understanding of the specific topic of the deliberation. As Weil and McGill (1989) note, '[t]he most pervasive form of learning is that which comes by and from experience'. Being involved in production provides experiential learning, and adds to one's knowledge as a basis for deliberation.

A brief rationale will now be given for the use of the ordinal measure of low, medium and high to allow comparative analysis of the two case study types of CSI.

#### Qualitative categories

Three qualitative categories were used for the comparative analysis to assess the performance of the case studies against each of the indicators. These categories were low, medium and high. These categories were chosen as they allow sufficient differentiation between weak and strong performance, given the amount of data available. Each of the levels was defined with a range of other CSIs in mind, in other words how the specific CSI would compare to other CSIs.

The data derived from the literature review of both case study areas, participant observation particularly from the two Tasmanian initiatives but also from observation of international meetings and on-ground initiatives, and from both sets of interviews. The ideal and the on-ground practice of each CSI was analysed separately. The ideal version of each CSI shows the potential of each CSI, for example should increased resources be committed to developing the CSI. How the CSI is currently being practised reflects current levels of unsustainability norms, in terms of there being a gap between the ideal and reality. However it is noted that sometimes there was overlap between the two, such that it was not always possible to clearly attribute a particular aspect of either CSI to discussion of the ideal, or the CSI in practice.

## Limitations of the study

Three main limitations of the study are that firstly it did not aim to produce generalisable results, instead it focused in depth on the two case studies. However the results can be seen to provide substantial insight into the potential generally of CSIs to foster sustainability norms. Secondly, the subjective nature of the use of the framework is openly acknowledged. Although substantial effort was expended to try and avoid bias, in particular by using multiple sources of data, subjectivity is inevitable (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). The intention was less to identify definitive 'objective' ratings, but rather to highlight firstly the indicators that influence the capacity of CSIs to foster sustainability norms, and then to highlight the potential of CSIs like CSA and LETS to promote these indicators.

The third limitation is the nature of the interviews. Both sets of interviews were conducted early in the research, in particular before all aspects of the research were fully developed. However they still provided valuable data to help answer the research questions.

## Conclusion

This chapter firstly outlined the methodology used of comparative case study research, for which the methods of a literature review, participant observation and semi-structured interviews were used to compare the two types of CSIs. The rationale for the choice of the two types of CSI was then discussed. A framework was developed as a tool for comparative analysis of both case studies for their capacity to foster sustainability norms.

The next chapter will use the framework to analyse the first case study of community supported agriculture for its potential to foster the four sustainability norms.

## 5. Case study one: Community Supported Agriculture

Agri-food (covering the production and consumption of food, fibre and pharmaceuticals) has special significance for sustainability. The way we grow, produce, distribute and consume food in particular has a substantial impact on economic, social and environmental sustainability. Many authors point to community involvement in agri-food systems as having the potential to increase sustainability by more effectively satisfying basic human needs, while reducing environmental degradation (Winne, 2005; Seyfang, 2007; Wise, 2014). An important benefit of community agri-food initiatives, in common with other instances of localisation, is increased feedback (Sundkvist et al., 2005). For example, shorter distances between the production and consumption of food allows consumers to gain a greater appreciation of how food is produced. This greater awareness may then lead to increased commitment to support local food production (Iles, 2005).

There is substantial diversity of community driven agri-food initiatives, in part reflecting the different circumstances of different locations, in other words, different contexts (Kloppenburger et al., 2000). This dissertation uses the case study of one particular community agri-food initiative, community supported agriculture. To analyse the case, this chapter is divided into three sections. The first section outlines the case study of community supported agriculture (CSA). The second section then describes an on-ground initiative, the North-West Tasmania Community Supported Agriculture project (NWTCSA) for which data was collected via participant observation. The third section applies the analytic framework using the data from the NWTCSA and other data from the literature to analyse the potential of CSA to foster the four sustainability norms. The fourth section provides a summary of the chapter's findings.

### Literature review of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

Community supported agriculture (CSA) is a sustainable agri-food model that seeks in part to restore socioecological feedback loops (Sundkvist et al., 2005). At the operational level, CSA is a produce-box scheme where the common model is based on produce being provided directly without intermediaries from one or more farmers to a group of consumers (Henderson and En, 1999). Vegetables comprise

the most commonly provided produce: fruit, eggs, dairy products, grains and bakery products, honey, flowers and meat are also included in some schemes. Boxes are generally provided weekly, and although some schemes offer more choice than others, generally the vegetable contents of the box are determined by whatever the farmer harvests that week (Henderson and En 1999). Consumers become 'shareholders' by committing for the whole season to receive the boxes, ideally by paying in advance. Depending in particular on the climate, the season may run from three or four months to twelve months of the year. By selling directly to shareholders, and by shareholders to varying degrees providing working capital to the farmer in advance, farmers can receive higher prices for their produce than they would selling their produce to an intermediary, thereby gaining greater financial security, and allowing them to concentrate more on growing quality produce rather than spending time on marketing. The most commonly quoted broad aim of CSA is for farmers to share the responsibilities and rewards of farming with CSA shareholders, based primarily on the extra support shareholders give to farmers above and beyond the conventional market exchange relationship (Lamb, 1994). Volz and Govi (2016) also highlight the sharing of the costs and risks of food production, as well as the rewards and responsibilities between farmers and consumers. Although this is an ideal that is often not realised, it constitutes an important contrast to conventional market relationships, where sellers aim to maximise their profits and buyers to minimise purchase prices.

For Fieldhouse (1996) the three important dimensions of CSA are sharing, community building, and sustainable agriculture. Participants ideally share the real costs of food production through fair prices for the farmer. And in agreeing to share the risks of farming, if weather conditions, pests or diseases reduce the amount of food produced, shareholders in theory receive less produce. The CSA model can therefore be seen to involve shareholders not so much in paying for food as a commodity, rather more as providing support for the farmer (Bloom, 2009) to grow healthy food and preserve ecological health.

According to O'Hara and Stagl (2001), CSA enterprises are 'complex institutions of communication and interaction between producers and consumers, who seek to communicate their individual interests as well as the overall interests and objectives of the CSA' (p 546). The interaction and communication mentioned by

O'Hara and Stagl (2001) generates associative processes, which comprises the core economic aspect of the CSA concept. Associative economics, which involves both parties engaging in economic transactions explicitly taking account of the other parties' needs and points of view, was one of the foundational principles of CSA (Groh and McFadden). As Groh and McFadden (1997) state, an associative economic perspective involves the belief that 'taking the needs of our partners as motivation for our economic actions will lead to the greatest welfare of all involved'.<sup>71</sup> This is a fundamental element of reciprocity, collaboration, social learning, and building collective values. Likewise for Bloom (2009), associative economics or associative pricing involves transparency, social engagement, long-term relationships and generally collaborative rather than competitive processes. In the ideal version of CSA with regards to price shareholders pay for their box, the prices are calculated based on a budget which includes the actual costs of production, including a living wage for the farmer. All these costs are added up before the start of the season, then the members pledge the amount they each wish to contribute to ensure the total costs are covered (Bloom, 2009). Those with more financial resources can in this way subsidise those with less financial resources.

The idea of CSA seems to have originated in the mid-1960s in both Japan and Germany (Ostrom, 1997). After the first two CSA farms in the USA started in 1986, the CSA concept then diversified into a wide range of social and legal forms. In particular at one end of the spectrum is the philosophically committed and ideologically driven form, with more commercially oriented 'subscription' farms at the other, and with a wide variety of intermediate forms between the two (Reynolds 2000). This diversity is a valuable aspect of CSA, as it can attract consumers with varying levels of commitment to sustainability principles to participate, from the 'sustainability activist' to the 'less reflective' food consumer (Reynolds, 2000). In practice, the ways that farms differ include their legal structure, who initiates the CSA,<sup>72</sup> the growing practices they use, the products they supply, the size of the operation, the level of commitment expected from

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<sup>71</sup> The comparison to Adam Smith's proclamation that self-interest leads to the greatest welfare of all is striking.

<sup>72</sup> Generally either a farmer/s or a group of consumers initiate a CSA farm. Alternatively an organisation such as a Food Bank, a church or a school may find someone to grow food for them.



shareholders, the structure of payments and how the contents of the boxes are determined.

Less purist CSA farms tend to adopt pricing structures based on conventional market prices. A problem with CSA in practice, similar to many alternative food networks, is that they frequently remain characterised by values based on conventional notions of economic rationality, rather than constructing new, positive, alternative arenas of action (Dwyer, 2005). Some authors convey the frustration of farmers and some shareholders in failing to achieve the community they initially envisioned (Kane and Lohr 1998; DeLind 1999). Motivations for involvement in CSA for many shareholders tends to be based on self-orientation, being related to individual health, and the safety and taste of the produce (Moore, 2006), rather than a desire to participate in community building and progressing towards sustainable agri-food systems (Kane and Lohr 1998).

A further criticism of CSA, along with many other alternative food networks, is that it often fails to contribute to food security for low-income groups. In particular, organic food grown on a small scale is commonly more expensive than conventional, large scale production. Even though CSA avoids the problem of a wholesaler taking a percentage of the price paid by consumers, nonetheless CSA farmers still have to charge a price approximating conventional produce retail prices. The consequence is that low income groups are frequently unable to afford the prices CSAs charge, especially where payment is requested in advance. However authors such as Schlicht et al. (2012) do note that some CSA farms offer discounts to those with less purchasing power, and/or offer the option of a 'working share', involving the contribution of work for a reduction in the cost of a share. In addition, in the USA many CSAs accept 'food stamps'<sup>73</sup> which assists low income groups to purchase healthy food.

Particularly to the extent that there may be further increases in the price of food in the near future, access to healthy food for low socio-economic groups may become even more important. On the other hand, issues of equity cannot be resolved without broad community and/or government action. Ostrom (1997)

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<sup>73</sup> This is now called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

contends that this issue can begin to be addressed by CSAs forming strong linkages with other institutions, such as food policy councils and food security initiatives<sup>74</sup>.

While it is commonly thought that organic market gardeners make the ideal CSA farmers, one interesting recent variation is called Neighbourhood Supported Agriculture (NSA). This challenges the conventional notion of who can be a farmer. As Gibson-Graham (2011) note, NSA involves suburban dwellers becoming 'urban farmers' and joining with others to grow a variety of produce. Since most backyards have limited space,<sup>75</sup> there needs to be a relatively large number of growers joining together, thus possibly generating additional benefits over the traditional CSA model.

The growth in the number of CSA farms in recent years indicates that the concept is appealing to an ever-increasing number of people. Peterson et al. (2015) estimate there were 3,795 CSA farms in the USA alone in 2010. Volz and Govi (2016) report that based on data collected in 16 different European countries, there were over 4,000 CSA groups in these countries in 2014, involving almost 465,000 consumers and 6,300 farms.

With regards to challenging conventional norms, Ostrom (1997) contends that at least some CSA shareholders view their participation as more to support farmers than for paying for food as a commodity. Ostrom (1997) found that norms did change as a result of shareholders' membership of a CSA farm. For example, she reports results from surveys that up to 91 % of the respondents claimed their household eating and shopping habits had changed in a positive direction as a result of their CSA membership<sup>76</sup>. In addition, the literature points to the ideal of CSA being focused on the de-commodification of land and food (Ostrom, 1997).

With regards to the de-commodification of land, Groh and McFadden (1997) highlight the higher than average alternative forms of property ownership used by many CSA farms. One example is community land trusts, where the land is held in common by a community through a legal trust, which then leases the land to CSA farmers (Lamb, 1994; McFadden, 2003).

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<sup>74</sup> Food Policy Initiatives involving governments such as Food Policy Councils are much more common in the USA than in Australia. However there is increased activity in Australia towards non-governmental initiatives such as the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance.

<sup>75</sup> The use of front yards is also encouraged.

<sup>76</sup> In particular by increased consumption of fruit and vegetables.

In opposition to a particularly well entrenched mainstream norm, many CSA farmers aim not to maximise profits, but rather tend to embrace pro-socio-ecological goals to a greater level than in conventional farming (Schlicht et al. 2012). Cone and Kakaliouras (1995) provide some further insight into the CSA philosophy, stating that:

There is a common stereotype of farmers as being rugged individualists who take pride in working independently. The CSA farmers in this study do not fit that image. Though several grew up on farms or have had some experience on farms, all were engaged in education or community activism prior to starting a CSA farm. Thus they bring to gardening a commitment to community building along with necessary organisational and educational skills. Their dedication to CSA includes a willingness to exchange a higher standard of living, for which their education and experience have prepared them, for the satisfaction of creating a new institutional arrangement that addresses multiple societal needs - healthy food, healthy land and healthy social relationships (p 29).

This implication of CSA farmers in general being prepared to forego their own short-term self-interest for the sake of community building, in other words, 'a focus on the other' gives one indication of the capacity of the CSA movement to contribute to fostering sustainability norms.

Finally the sustainability interviews conducted for this dissertation provided some insight into the potential of CSA to foster sustainability norms. One interviewee directly involved in the management of a CSA made a number of relevant comments. The first comment quoted here relates to the important potential of CSA to reduce negative externalities:

[w]e are an ethical, environmental business and therefore seek to internalise externalities. This puts a huge amount of pressure on us to perform beyond our capacity. Expectations of us from a moral perspective are extremely high .... It is tremendously hard to run a business let alone one that internalises social and environmental costs (S4).

Another comment from the same interviewee highlighted the flexibility of the CSA model, of the importance of adapting it to local circumstances and of social entrepreneurship more generally:

[p]eople have become inspired by our [CSA] model and cherry picked, that is what we like, we like to be cherry picked, we don't like to be cookie cut. It means that people are adapting it for their own regional area, their own skill set, their experience, applying new ideas rather than just sticking to one formula. If you are not continually developing something then it's never going to evolve. I am pretty single minded that the CSA model has the

possibility of being the major player in how food is produced. But instead of having the one wheel barrow out there, we realised that we need to cultivate a space where more social entrepreneurs could enter that space to do ethical food and fibre distribution. That would help accelerate a very autonomous and creative movement. That's the space we are in, our slogan is growing food systems, growing social entrepreneurs. My skill is bringing the farming world, the entrepreneurial world and business world together, that generally don't talk to each other that well (S4).

In this final quote the interviewee critiques the dominant means of food production and expresses the view that alternative models can make a difference:

[t]he food space is so big and dominated by two big players and they are not much good at it. They are good at the logistics side, at certain parts, but they are really bad at looking after farmers, they are really bad at providing healthy food, there are a lot of things they are bad at, so small players can get in there and we can do way better than them. With this network of food social entrepreneurs we can actually start to swing it around. Because we have a lot of farmers supporting us, via the ripple effect, they are going to put pressure on the major supermarkets (S4)

Due to these benefits of CSA, over ten years ago I became interested in its potential for progressing towards ecological, social and economic sustainability. This resulted in the setting up of a CSA in North-West Tasmania, as described below.

#### North-West Tasmanian CSA case study

My involvement with community supported agriculture began in approximately 2003 when I was working for the Victorian Department of Primary Industries. I received a grant in 2004 to conduct a small project to promote CSA in the Yarra Valley in the outer suburban area of Melbourne. A local agribusiness group funded the project, as they were interested in the concept as a means of increasing the economic sustainability of small farmers. The project involved producing a booklet on setting up a CSA, and conducting two focus groups on the feasibility of starting CSA farms in Victoria. The funding was restricted to these two goals, but it highlighted the considerable interest in the concept of CSA, both from small-scale farmers and from consumers.

When I moved to Tasmania in 2006, I investigated setting up a CSA in the North-West region of Tasmania. The community group I was involved with was able to

secure a small amount of funding in 2008 from the Burnie City Council <sup>77</sup> to initiate the North-West Tasmanian CSA. The project began with searching for suitable farmers to grow the produce. The main criteria were that they farm in the local area, have some experience with market-garden type production, and use organic growing techniques. After a snowball technique of seeking the names of possible farmers, three farmers were found who fitted the criteria and were interested in trialling the CSA concept. The model that was decided on was based on each farmer supplying their own group of shareholders rather than the three pooling their produce and jointly supplying the group as a whole. The main reason for using this model was that the three farms were relatively distant from each other (approximately 50 kilometres apart). Hence each farmer catered only for those living closest to the farm to minimise delivery costs. One other main aspect of the model was delivery of the produce boxes to the shareholder's door. This was acknowledged as not necessarily the most efficient method of delivery, and not fully in keeping with the ideal of shareholders visiting the farm to pick up their produce. However again because of the distance of the farms from the main population centres, picking up the produce from the farms was not feasible.

The next task was to find a sufficient number of shareholders, for which a letterbox delivery of flyers was conducted and a public meeting held. The initial target was to find 15 individuals and/or families, so each farmer would have roughly five shareholders each. The intention was to deliberately start small to ensure that a good quality of produce could be maintained while the project was in the building phase. There was a good response to both the flyer and at the public meeting, with the target fairly quickly being reached of 15 customers in total signing a contract. The contract committed the customers to paying for a weekly box for a 16-week period, beginning in January 2009. The third task was to form a core group (that is, a management group) to help manage the project. The tasks of the core group included marketing and publicity, recruiting new members, and organising social events. It also included producing a regular newsletter which in each edition profiled a different member, featured a specific vegetable,

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<sup>77</sup> Burnie is a major town in the North-West of Tasmania.

provided recipes particularly for unusual vegetables, and provided news from the project, including upcoming social events, and news from the farmers and farms.

Expressions of interest were sought from the shareholders to serve on the core group, from which four people responded. I made up the fifth member of the core group. The four who volunteered to serve on the core group were generally motivated by the CSA philosophy of promoting local food, including decreased distances between production and consumption, and by the health benefits of fresh, organically grown produce.

Deliveries began in January 2009 and continued that year until the finish of the summer crops in May. Fifteen shareholders were involved over that period, with roughly five per farmer. Only two shareholders withdrew during that period<sup>78</sup>, and two replacements were quickly found from a waiting list. The farmers did not have infrastructure such as glasshouses to continue to produce into winter and spring,<sup>79</sup> which did somewhat reduce the impact of the project. However all three farmers began again in 2010, with roughly the same number of shareholders. Feedback sheets were distributed early on in the project with each box to gain comments on whether the shareholders were satisfied with their participation, in particular regarding the contents of the boxes. Most of the comments were quite positive, with only a few concerned about receiving vegetables they did not like. Attempts were then made to tailor the boxes for these shareholders. On an organisational level, formal meetings were held with myself and the farmers approximately twice during the season, with much more frequent informal meetings and other forms of communication between the farmers and the core group.

My participant observation of the NTWCSA included keeping as many notes as possible on the 15 participants in the project, including their willingness to volunteer their time in helping to run the initiative, their level of acceptability of the variety of vegetables offered, and their preferences regarding the delivery of the box. These all indicate the extent to which the members were interested and able to engage in the project. Willingness to volunteer, flexibility about the

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<sup>78</sup> There will always be those who cannot adapt to the CSA concept, as mentioned by Cone and Kakaliouras (1995).

<sup>79</sup> Tasmania is a cool climate region and thus there are a limited number of vegetable crops that can be grown over winter and spring without some form of protection.

content of the boxes, and willingness to assist with delivery of the boxes, or at least be flexible about finding efficient delivery solutions, rather than maximising individual convenience (for example expecting delivery to the door) were all indications of how much the members saw the project as more than just a way for them to access organically grown vegetables. Informal discussions were also conducted infrequently with members, and more frequently with the core group. I also visited CSA farms in the USA, and attended their National Conference in 2004. I attended an international CSA conference<sup>80</sup> in Portugal in 2005, and CSA initiatives in the UK, Belgium and the Netherlands during the same year.

The fragility of small scale community projects which are reliant on a few key players is indicated by the NWTCSA case study. All three farmers suffered misfortune beginning in 2010, which led one by one between 2010 and 2012 to the farmers being unable to continue supplying their shareholders. The events of the death of one of the co-farmers, family breakdown and injuries all made it impossible for them to continue. Replacement farmers could not be found, highlighting that in North-West Tasmania at least, it is difficult to find farmers with the characteristics to supply a CSA initiative. In one respect it was gratifying that this was the source of the projects demise, rather than an inability to attract customers, or an inability to make enough income to at least cover costs.<sup>81</sup> However one of the farmers has since renewed his efforts to participate again in a CSA initiative. In addition, the project spawned a further project called the Wynyard Community Food Collaboration.

### **Wynyard Community Food Collaboration (WCFC)**

In 2011 the Tasmanian Government allocated funds for a competitive grants program aimed at addressing food insecurity. It illustrated the extent to which community food is increasingly seen as an opportunity to address some of the complex problems facing localities such as Tasmania with relatively high levels of disadvantage compared with other areas of Australia.

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<sup>80</sup> This was organised by the international movement promoting CSA called 'Urgenci'. See <http://urgenci.net/>.

<sup>81</sup> However it was a challenge for the income to cover the costs, as is common with particularly small scale agriculture.

The Wynyard Community Food Collaboration (WCFC)<sup>82</sup> was successful in applying for funds from the Tasmanian Government, so was established as a follow-on project from the NWTCSA. It ran from the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 2012 to the 30<sup>th</sup> of November 2014. This project had three phases with the ultimate goal of establishing a variation of Community Supported Agriculture called Neighbourhood Supported Agriculture (NSA). As previously discussed, this involves ‘backyard growers’ joining together to either swap produce, or more formally to supply vegetable boxes to shareholders.

The main target group for the first two phases of the project was disadvantaged families, including the disabled and unemployed people. The first phase was a series of workshops aimed at teaching the target group how to grow vegetables in their back yard, and to cook and/or preserve fresh fruits and vegetables. The second phase was aimed at promoting participation, particularly of the target group, in the project which is part of the second case study of this dissertation, a community currency project called Community Exchange Network Tasmania (CENTs). The ultimate aim in this phase was for individuals to trade food outside of the conventional market economy. The third phase was aimed at commencing the Neighbourhood Supported Agriculture (NSA) project, ideally involving the target group but realistically involving anyone with the capacity and interest in becoming a NSA grower.<sup>83</sup> The project ended up falling short of some of these aims. On reflection this was in part because some of the aims were unrealistic, in particular being able to find enough people willing and able to become a NSA grower. The main lesson gleaned from this project was the difficulty of engaging low socioeconomic groups, which may be for a variety of reasons, including an understandable reluctance to engage in programs run by people from different socioeconomic classes<sup>84</sup>.

### **Community supported agriculture toolkit**

A third related project was conducted by myself in partnership with another community group in the southern region of Tasmania, again funded by the

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<sup>82</sup> Wynyard is a small town close to Burnie in North-West Tasmania

<sup>83</sup> Reflecting in part unfamiliarity with the role of being a prosumer.

<sup>84</sup> Williams (2002) found this was a barrier to participation of low socioeconomic individuals and groups in community initiatives.



Tasmanian Government food security program. This project aimed to develop a toolkit for people wanting to start a CSA initiative. It was particularly aimed at ‘multi-farm’ CSAs, with the inclusion of software to keep track of and calculate quantities, and hence the share of income, due to each farm and/or grower. The toolkit also had a number of templates ranging from media releases to member contract forms. The number of different elements that ended up in the toolkit showed the complexity of the CSA concept in terms of firstly starting any new business, and secondly the aspects unique to CSA, such as the use of a contract between the farmer/s and the shareholders. My involvement in this project contributed to my knowledge and understanding of CSA, particularly the diversity of forms of CSA that currently exist.

### **Work for dole market gardens**

The most recent project involving community supported agriculture I am involved in illustrates how the basic CSA concept can be adapted, and revolves around two ‘work for the dole’ projects. The Australian Government has a policy of ‘mutual obligation’ in relation to the unemployed, whereby those claiming unemployment benefits in return must commit to working in activities for a certain number of hours per week, which will at least in theory increase their ‘job readiness’. Community projects are one of the main types of activities offered to job seekers to satisfy their ‘mutual obligation’.<sup>85</sup>

To date this project has resulted in the establishment of two market gardens, one at a high school, and one at a church. During the 2015/16 season, some vegetable boxes have been supplied to individuals, as well as to a nearby Community House which supplies vegetables to low income groups. The interesting aspect of this model is the use of work for the dole, and the partnerships with an educational and a religious institution. Reciprocity remains the core relationship underpinning the project, with substantial volunteering of people’s time to enable the project to be sustained.

The next section will apply the framework to CSA, as one important type of CSI.

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<sup>85</sup> Mutual obligation somewhat ironically is the governments version of reciprocity.

## Applying the framework

The data used for the following analysis the literature review of CSA, my attendance at international CSA conferences and CSA farms, and participant observation of the NWTCSA and related projects in Wynyard. There are two ratings for each criterion. The first rating refers to an analysis of the potential of the ideal form of CSA. The literature provides the main source of data for this rating, in terms of reviewing how various authors view the underlying potential of CSA. This includes an analysis of structural capacity. For example, if CSA did not involve people interacting to achieve its aims, there would be no structural capacity for deliberation. The data was supplemented by my attendance international CSA conferences. The second rating analyses CSA in terms of how it is actually being practised. Participant observation of the NWTCSA and subsequent projects, as well as visits to other CSA farms, provides the main source of data, with the addition of evidence from the literature. For each criterion a number of indicators (see Table 1) are used to gauge the extent to which CSA may be able to foster each norm. It is recognised these measures are imperfect, however it is contended that they are likely to at least capture the main potentialities relevant to each norm. Table 2 gives the ratings for each indicator, Table 3 gives a summary of the ratings, then a discussion follows of the rationale for each rating.

Table 2: Ratings for each indicator for Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

Sustainability Norms	Indicators	Ideal	Practice
1. Reciprocity	1.1 Volunteering	Medium	Low-medium
	1.2 Dominant exchange type	Medium	Low
2. Equity	2.1 Redistribution	High	Low- medium
3. Efficiency	3.1 Localisation	High	High
	3.2 Dematerialisation	High	Medium-High
4. Deliberation	4.1 Purposeful social interaction	Medium-high	Medium-high
	4.2 Prosumption	Medium	Medium

Table 3: Summary of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) ratings.

Criteria	Ideal	Practice
Generalised reciprocity	Medium	Low -medium
Equity	High	Low- medium
Efficiency	High	Medium - high
Deliberation	Medium - high	Medium -high

### Generalised reciprocity

As discussed in chapters one and two, generalised reciprocity is a necessary norm to enable humans to survive and thrive as an interdependent species. The norm of generalised reciprocity refers to automatic provision or giving of value due to feelings of obligation, versus doing so to explicitly seek material gain in return, or because of fear of being punished. In essence, generalised reciprocity refers to not expecting explicit payment for one's contribution. Community initiatives are generally motivated by satisfying needs that are not able to be fulfilled via the market (via balanced reciprocity, or contractual exchange), therefore by definition community initiatives are based on generalised reciprocity, as the basic alternative to the market (and coercion via the state). Therefore voluntary contribution was used as the indicator of the potential of CSA to foster the norm of generalised reciprocity. The next section analyses the potential of the ideal form of CSA to foster the norm of generalised reciprocity.

### Ideal

Volunteering often involves a relatively low level of skills; in fact professional volunteering tends to be given a different name: pro bono.<sup>86</sup> In the ideal version of CSA there are many and varied opportunities for volunteering. Some do involve more specialised skills such as helping to research, write and distribute a

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<sup>86</sup> Pro bono often refers to free legal assistance but is also used to refer to other professional services given voluntarily.

newsletter, while others require less specialist skills such as helping to distribute the boxes, directly helping the farmer with the basics of growing vegetables, and recruiting new members. Since CSA has the capacity to increase positive social interaction, through which participants may become more willing to volunteer their time, and there is a variety of volunteer tasks to attract participants, it does appear to have a high potential to foster norms of generalised reciprocity.

The focus on local food in addition appears to be a factor in attracting volunteers. As Campbell (2009) notes there has been a number of dynamics contributing to the increased profile of local foods. This includes the rise of new social movements focused on food and the environment, and the emergence of popular authors such as Michael Pollan and celebrity chefs such as Rick Stein, who have increased awareness of the 'politics of eating' (Campbell, 2009). Likewise Dubuisson-Quellier and Lamine (2006) in analysing both Fair Trade and CSA note the growing amount of interest in these types of agri-food initiatives, specifically in the willingness to contribute to policies regarding agri-food production and distribution of food issues.

With regards to the second indicator of the dominant means of exchange, on the other hand, even the ideal version of the basic CSA model is based on monetary exchange as the main form of exchange. This tends to reduce the extent to which CSA can foster the norm of generalised reciprocity. To better foster the norm of generalised reciprocity, the basic model would need to change structurally to rely less on monetary exchange, and move more towards exchange via quasi or full generalised reciprocity. In the current climate, this is difficult to achieve with the already narrow profit margins experienced by many CSA farms (Shrestha, 2012).<sup>87</sup>

On balance, the rating given is medium due to firstly the reduced potential of CSA to foster generalised reciprocity given its grounding in market relationships, while on the positive side there are ample opportunities for volunteering, and its focus on local production and consumption appears to be attracting increasing numbers of volunteers.

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<sup>87</sup>Also see a UK Soil Association report (2004) that found that returns to CSA farmers although generally higher than mainstream farmers, still did not allow sufficient ongoing investment in the farm, such as replacing old machinery, or provide for savings for retirement.

Rating; medium

## Practice

With regards to the levels of volunteering in the NWTCSA projects, there was some level of interest in volunteering, but this was limited. A common trend regarding community initiatives generally is that there is a small group who take on the tasks which often cannot be externally funded and therefore require volunteer input (Seyfang and Smith, 2007). In other words there is a strong theme of volunteering by those who become involved in the management of the CSA. Certainly in the case of the original NWTCSA, the core (management) group did contribute time in publishing a newsletter, in meeting regularly to guide the project, to organise publicity, social events and so on. The general members however did not contribute volunteer time to any great extent to the project. They were given the opportunity to become involved as volunteers in even small tasks, but most declined to assist. The most common reason given was lack of time. Some members however did contribute recipes for the newsletter, and some expressed a desire to help out if they had had more time available. There was perhaps a feeling from many that their payment absolved them from further involvement, that their commitment to buy the produce boxes for the season was sufficient support for the project.

By joining together with institutions such as churches and schools, however, the latest stage (the work for the dole phase) of the NWTCSA can facilitate additional opportunities for volunteering. For example, at the work for the dole market garden at the high school, some of the students who are somewhat disengaged from conventional schooling have been volunteering at the garden, and appear to have benefited from the experience.<sup>88</sup>

The literature reflects a somewhat similar pattern of polarisation, of some volunteer input, mainly at the management level, but otherwise a minimum of volunteer input amongst non-management shareholders (DeLind, 1999). This is evident for example to the extent that authors mentioned disappointment about the lack of interest in 'community' (DeLind 1999, Cone and Kakaliouras 1995). For

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<sup>88</sup> Personal correspondence with teachers who commented that after a few weeks of volunteering the behaviour of the school children had noticeably improved.

example, Kane and Lohr (1998) found in a survey of shareholders from a CSA farm that 52% claimed they didn't have any expectations about the community component of CSA. Specifically 'they didn't want to visit the farm, they didn't want to meet new people, and they didn't have time to volunteer or help with distribution' (no pg). Those who did express an interest in community participation, largely did not have a high level of interest (Kane and Lohr 1998).

In short, CSA provides the structure and reason for people to come together and to volunteer their time without requiring the promise of a material benefit in return. A low to medium rating was given however because of the relatively low take-up of volunteering opportunities evident in the NWTCSA case study, the other CSA farms I visited, and in the literature.

Rating: low — medium

### Equity

Equity refers to being fair or the achievement of justice, whereby consumption is maintained both above a minimum level, and below a maximum level. Equity can be interpreted in relation to CSA whereby firstly people have access to sufficient levels of healthy, fresh food, regardless of their purchasing power. This equates to (healthy) food being a right, therefore an equitable society would ensure all have access to sufficient quantities of fresh, healthy food. The second element is for CSA farmers to be paid a fair wage, often called a 'living wage' in terms of being sufficient to fund a reasonable standard of living. In a survey of CSA farms in the USA, Tegtmeier and Duffy (2005) found that more than half of the CSA farmers responded that they did not receive a fair wage from their CSA operation. Hence any process giving greater returns to the farmer could be deemed a form of redistribution.

### Ideal

With regards to redistribution, the predominant means of increasing access to fresh, healthy food for low income individuals via CSA is for those who can afford it to voluntarily subsidise those less able to. For any system which attempts to internalise externalities, of which organic agricultural production is a classic case,

the age old paradox is that the increased prices which result tend to exclude those on low incomes. Stagl (2012) notes that the prices of organic produce are typically 20 to 25% higher than conventional produce. Allen (1999) makes precisely the point that this tends to exclude low income individuals. Some discussions of CSA in fact emphasise the low returns to CSA farmers and advocate for an increasing of the share price to better reflect the true costs of production (Shrestha, 2012). Equitable access for low income groups then becomes even more important via subsidising from other shareholders, or via the state.

In the ideal CSA model, the budget for the whole farm is calculated and then members declare whether they can only afford to pay the average, or above or below the average share price. The average share price is calculated by dividing the total budget by the number of shareholders. Ideally the total budget includes a 'living wage' for the farmer. Also sufficient numbers of shareholders are required to be willing to pay a higher amount than the average share price to compensate for those who are unable to pay the average share price. With regards to the timing of payment, in the ideal version of CSA shareholders pay in advance for the whole season to better financially support the farmer. This can be adjusted for low socioeconomic shareholders who may not be able to afford full payment in advance. In addition, giving a greater return to farmers is also an important step towards equity.

A second method of redistribution involves the premise of the sharing of the rewards and responsibilities of farming between the farmers and the shareholders. One element here is that if there is an abundance of produce, shareholders get more produce in their boxes, conversely if there is a crop failure they get less. Since crop failures are a constant concern for farmers and often lead to lower returns, in theory this aspect of CSA could be seen as a form of redistribution.

On balance the rating given for the potential of the ideal form of CSA to foster the norm of equity is high, since the two mechanisms are a strong means of progressing towards the equitable meeting of basic needs of low socioeconomic shareholders and the often low income farmers.

Rating: high

## Practice

The NWTCSA did not get the opportunity to become established sufficiently such that consideration could be given to the two identified mechanisms for progressing towards equity. In addition, due to the conservative nature of many people in Tasmania's North-West, and the relatively high level of disadvantage compared to other areas of Australia, it is challenging to initiate anything seen as alternative generally, and specifically that is redistributive.

From my observation of other CSA type initiatives, the use of the two mechanisms varies significantly, including between countries. In Australia for example, there is simply a much different culture with regards to CSA, where it is a very new concept, compared to the USA, which has a 40-year history of CSA. The literature on CSA, particularly in the USA, does show a somewhat higher level of use of strategies that act to foster the norm of equity. The values inherent in the concept have had a much longer time to develop in CSA in the USA. For instance Lass (2008) notes one finding from a national survey in the USA that 56 percent of farms indicated that they offered low-income programs for their communities.

However overall the use of these strategies is still fairly limited, compared to the ideal. There is still no real evidence of a high level of subsidisation, of true sharing of responsibilities, and of equitable determination of share prices. For instance Sluyter (2007) notes that particularly farmer-led CSA initiatives pride themselves in providing the full complement of vegetables expected by shareholders. Hence if one or more crops fail, they tend to buy in certified organic and/or organically grown produce from other farmers to make up the shortfall. This generally means a lower return for the farmer. If the ideal of shareholders receiving less produce in the event of crop failure is adhered to, more equitable outcomes for farmers are likely to be the result. And as Stagl (2002) and Tegtmeier (2005) note, CSA farmers still often do struggle to generate a living wage for themselves.

Another mechanism is for the state to impose redistribution and subsidise CSAs to allow greater affordability for low income groups. However apart from one off grants to help for example a non-profit CSA to become established, governments appear to not allocate any funds for on-going support of CSAs (Schlicht, 2012). The rating given therefore is low to medium.



Rating: low— medium

## Efficiency

### Ideal

Efficiency refers here to ensuring that consumption minimises resource use to contribute to greater ecological sustainability and to greater equity. The first indicator used to assess efficiency is of the extent of localisation. While it is recognised localisation does not always equate to reduced use of resources, such as reduced embedded energy, on balance the literature appears to support the view that reduced distances between production and consumption result in less energy use for transport. As Rigby and Bown (2003) note, 'the movement of food has implications in terms of both energy use and the pollutants that result' (p 9). They point to increased movement of food at the national and international level as substantially increasing resource use<sup>89</sup>.

Reduced packaging is another example of resource savings that can occur via localisation (Bjune and Torjusen, 2005). To the extent that CSA farms can reduce energy spent on food processing, packaging, transport and marketing, they do have a fairly substantial potential to reduce resource use. Bjune and Torjusen (2005) contend that these aspects of food distribution and consumption use about 75 to 85 per cent of the energy consumed in the food system. Likewise Schlicht et al. (2012) note that 'the direct environmental, social and economic costs of food transport are estimated to be over 10 billion € in the UK each year' (p 18), therefore CSA farms in reducing food miles can potentially reduce resource use. However there is also research cautioning against an automatic assumption that local food reduces ecological footprints. Mariola (2008) for example, notes that the transport of local food such as getting it from the farm to shareholders may be quite costly in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, with all shareholders possibly having to drive a further distance than they otherwise would to pick up their produce. In addition, there may be other inefficiencies due to low economies of scale.

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<sup>89</sup> However see Mariola (2008) for a more nuanced view, whereby it is not always clearly the case that food transported long distances uses more resources than locally produced and consumed food.

Localisation also highlights the restriction of consumption to those goods and services that can be provided locally. One element of the limitation of this as an indicator is that ultimately the extent to which participants satisfy their produce consumption needs within the CSA versus in the conventional economy. The point is however that localisation is an important underlying core component of CSA generally, and hence can result in a reduction of the use of resources. The main aim is to encourage people to consume as much food as possible of what can be provided within the CSA. This of course does not preclude people in any way from consuming food that has been transported longer distances and using growing techniques using a high level of resources, but to the extent they satisfy their food needs via a CSA involves an element of 'making do' with what is available locally as a foundational norm. This is reflected by eating in season, whereby not in eating in season means food travels a relatively long distance from where it is in season, particularly between the northern and southern hemispheres.

With regards to dematerialisation as a means of fostering norms of efficiency, a major means for CSA of reducing resources as inputs into the production process is in the use of low input, organic farming techniques. Stagl (2002) contends that '[s]ince CSA farms almost exclusively produce organically, they use less energy than conventionally producing farms' (p 154). Again however this may not occur in all cases. But reductions in energy can occur via re-substituting labour for chemical inputs, and internalising externalities. Shareholders must be willing to either contribute directly by supplying labour to the farm, or pay a higher share price for these extra 'costs'. In the ideal model of CSA, shareholders do give farmers direct and indirect support to grow ecologically and hence minimise resource use.

Hence the focus of CSA in providing local, ecologically sustainably produced food places CSA as an important means of reducing the resource intensity of consumption compared to conventional production and distribution methods. While many shareholders may have a low level of awareness of and interest in this aspect of CSA, it is possible that any shareholder who remains a shareholder for any length of time will increase their understanding and commitment to ecological sustainability, as indicated by Stagl (2002).

To summarise, CSA on the one hand has a high level of potential to foster the norm of efficiency, due to its focus on methods of producing and distributing food that minimise resource inputs and seek to preserve ecological health. An underlying focus of the philosophy of CSA is of ecological sustainability, hence to the extent that farmers and other CSA managers can communicate the linking of reduced resource inputs and ecological health to shareholders, the norm of efficiency will be promoted. Communication with shareholders such as via newsletters is but one means of promoting efficiency, ranging from subtle means such as recipes for the use of unusual vegetables, gluts of vegetables and ‘left overs’.<sup>90</sup> In addition, CSA has a focus on sustainable agricultural techniques, whereby for example Volz and Govi (2016) identify CSA as a significant means of promoting agroecology (combining ecology and agriculture).

Rating: high

### Practice

For the NWTCSA, in relation to localisation, most of the produce for the boxes was provided directly from the local farms, that is, produce travelled no further than approximately 15 kilometres.<sup>91</sup> In addition, in general the shareholders largely confined their consumption of vegetables to the contents of the boxes, as indicated by the responses to feedback sheets given early in the season. Most shareholders indicated they had not supplemented their box to any great degree from conventional grocery sources such as supermarkets.

Furthermore, the three NWTCSA farmers were very committed to organic growing techniques, including using recycled materials for soil improving amendments (that is, compost). Two of the farmers were officially certified with a registered organic certifier, who require strict compliance with a large range of organic standards. An initiative of ‘community supported composting’ was gradually being introduced, where shareholders saved composting materials in terms of kitchen waste, which was then collected and used on the farms. Growing high quality food using closed

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<sup>90</sup> Often unusual vegetables may grow well in particular localities with low inputs. They may not be grown commercially due to low ability to be stored and transported over long distances.

<sup>91</sup> However one of the farmers at one stage did have difficulties providing brassicas, which are notoriously difficult to grow organically in summer in Tasmania, owing to persistent predation from insects. Produce in this case was purchased from an organic farm approximately 60 kilometres away.

loop systems as much as possible, which in turn involves as low an external input as possible, requires substantial attention from the farmer, and ideally support from the shareholders. In the NWTCSA case, widespread support to assist the farmers was not specifically forthcoming. This is partly because the project had not become sufficiently established to allow increased encouragement and structures for shareholders to participate. Hence in the longer term with increased encouragement and organisation it is expected there would be greater shareholder contribution.

In terms of the broader CSA literature, there are varying reports of levels of 'efficiency' when viewed as supporting the local production and consumption of food, and of supporting farmers to grow ecologically. CSA farms in particular have generally retained a high commitment to growing without the use of chemicals. For example, Lass et al (2008) found that 96% of CSA farms surveyed practised some form of organic or biodynamic production. This includes an element of closing loops within the production process, including converting 'waste products' into fertilisers.

The rating given for this criteria was medium to high, since localisation and sustainable agricultural growing practices are a fundamental aspect of CSA in practice, not just as an ideal. There could however be greater support given to farmers by shareholders for using sustainable growing practices. This could include direct support, such as on-farm assistance with making compost, or indirect support by paying the farmers an increased share price so that farmers can then allocate more resources to organic production techniques.

Rating: medium - high

### Deliberation

Deliberation here refers in essence to wide participation in decision making, hence in the discussing of the policies, rules and regulations for the CSA farm on the one hand, which can then lead on the other hand to discussion about the broader policies, rules and regulations at the local and national level which ultimately affect us all. Deliberation can contribute to sustainability by potentially increasing

the quality of decision making, by changing norms resulting from social interaction, and by satisfying basic needs of positive social interaction.

Firstly opportunities need to be provided for social interaction in the form of conversations between the shareholders, and for the outcomes of these conversations ideally to influence the management of the CSA initiative. Secondly rather than random conversations, a goal, direction or structure helps to increase the effectiveness of the deliberation. Thirdly, the greater the level of knowledge the shareholders have about all aspects relating to the CSA, the more effective deliberation will be. Prosumption, whereby rather than confining their role to one of only consuming CSA produce, shareholders become more involved in production is one way of increasing their knowledge via experiential learning.

The indicator of the potential of CSA to foster the norm of deliberation is therefore the extent to which it promotes purposeful social interaction. While it is recognised this is only one first step towards deliberation, it is a vital prerequisite. For situations where deliberation can be an ongoing process, rather than a one-off event, deliberation is enhanced when people get to know and trust each other. Hence regular face to face interaction is important as an initial component for effective deliberation.

### Ideal

On the one hand, the CSA literature does not reference deliberation as an explicit aim of CSA. On the other hand, there is a focus on increased social interaction. This social interaction is facilitated by the aims of the CSA, therefore is 'purposeful social interaction' which is likely to lead to greater opportunities for deliberation. It is unlikely particularly early in the life of a CSA that much attention is given to deliberation, for instance social events are likely to be focused more on members getting to know each other. This appears to be a necessary step in effective deliberation where members come to trust each other after repeated face to face interaction. This is not to suggest that repeated face to face interaction inevitably leads to greater trust, but rather it can increase the chances of this happening (Buunk, 1998). Stagl (2002) points out that the very structure of CSA in terms of the proximity of producers and consumers provides an

opportunity for dialogue, combining 'experts' in terms of farmers having ecological knowledge, with the more general local knowledge of shareholders.

Likewise Sundkvist (2005) notes that the increased reliance on local resources via CSA has the potential to generate more knowledge-intensive farming and for farmers and shareholders to observe, understand and respond to local agroecosystem feedback. As Dietz (2013) notes, decisions always involve both facts and values. The corollary is that linking more expert analysis (from farmers) to public deliberation in an iterative process can assist decision making based on both facts and values. Regular face to face interaction promoted by the regular production and consumption of produce boxes, based on a close relationship between farmers and shareholders, can at least in theory provide some of the basis of this iterative process.

The potential of CSA in an ideal sense to build networks which form the basis of deliberative communities (which can also be called discursive communities following Meppem (2000)) is indicated by Cone and Kakaliouras (1995) who contend that CSA farms aim for 'a new form of intentional community' (p 31). It is this structural potential of the opportunity for purposeful social interaction that appears to justify on the one hand a high rating for the potential of CSA to foster the norm of deliberation. On the other hand, CSA does not have a history of a focus on deliberation, therefore a medium to high rating was given.

Rating: medium — high

## Practice

For the NWTCSA, the main participative decision making occurred within the management team, in terms of decisions about share prices, how best to deliver the boxes, what social events to hold, the contents of the newsletter and so forth. The management team had some intentions of facilitating opportunities amongst the shareholders for deliberation, but a combination of lack of shareholder interest and time availability, and lack of availability of time of the management team meant formal ongoing conversations about CSA policies largely did not occur beyond the management team. Decisions such as how to determine the contents of the boxes, how to best organise deliveries and how best to support the farmers

however were some of the decisions that would have benefited from the participation of as many shareholders as possible. There was also only a low level of interest in social events during the original CSA. A greater level of interest in social events did occur via the Wynyard Community Food Collaboration and is continuing with the work for the dole projects, allowing for some progress towards increased deliberation. This has included workshops, potluck dinners and movie nights. The inclusion of partnerships with the high school and the church automatically increases communication required to deliberate towards convergence of the goals of the three organisations.

The broader CSA literature includes reports of varying levels of the holding of social events by CSA farms. Lass (2008) for example states that in a national survey 73.5 percent of the farms stated that they organised social and educational events for their shareholders and the broader community. Examples being potluck dinners, farm tours, preserving and other food and gardening related workshops, events for children of shareholders, and educational programs for the community and local schools (Lass 2008). These are all likely to increase the extent to which shareholders interact with each other and discuss matters of mutual interest. On the other hand Kane and Lohr (1998) did not find much support for the holding of CSA social events.

There is an element of awareness of the importance of deliberation to the extent that some authors advocate the development of a CSA charter, or 'bill of rights', which provides an opportunity for deliberation on what is and isn't included in the charter. Schlicht (2012) in particular recommends specifying the common values and principles agreed on by the farmer and members. This provides one of the more important opportunities to deliberate on values and principles.

The final point is that at a national and international level there is definite evidence of deliberation. Both at the conference in the USA, and the conference in Portugal (which were aimed at both practitioners and academics) there was much discussion about the myriad of issues with regards to increasing sustainability via direct relationships between producers and consumers, focusing on CSA. Although often conferences have a very low level of participation of practitioners, my perception was that these conferences do have a higher level of practitioner

attendance and participation that other conferences. This is similar to other conferences focused on community initiatives. However it can also be said that there remains an element of a separation between an academic and research perspective and a practitioner perspective. It appears of often the case that academics conduct research on community initiatives without themselves being a participant in them, thereby failing to have ‘insider knowledge’.

Deliberation at the international level in particular is quite strong, revolving around a group called Urgenci, which calls itself the ‘International Network of Community Supported Agriculture’.<sup>92</sup> One subgroup of Urgenci is a European CSA Research group which has sourced funding from the European Union (Volz and Govi, 2016), which indicates the level of potential CSA is perceived as having to help progress towards improved agroecological and social outcomes.

To summarise, in practice CSA is considered here to have a high level of potential to foster the norm of deliberation. This is due to the organised efforts, including those at the international level, to move beyond a basic system of more direct relationships between producers and consumers. Building greater political capacity and dialogue on how alternative food systems can increase sustainability, and more broadly how deliberation can improve decision making and other outcomes, is part of the recent trends. However this potential is tempered by the evidence to date that deliberation has been at a low level, and as discussed in the previous section, CSA does not have a history of specifically aiming to increase deliberation.

Rating: medium

## Conclusion

Applying the framework to the ideal vision of CSA and how it is practised shows that overall CSA has a good potential to foster all four sustainability norms. When looking at the individual norms, it could be observed that CSA has a particular strength in fostering efficiency, and a weakness in fostering generalised reciprocity. There was only a small difference between the ideal and the practice of CSA. Overall however there was generally a difference in the ratings between the ideal version and how CSA tends to operate in practice. The ideal account

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<sup>92</sup> See the website at <http://urgenci.net/>.



reflects how CSA was envisaged by its founders, and subsequently affirmed and built on by others. CSA in practice reflects how mainstream norms tend to influence the extent to which the ideal version can be implemented. If the CSA requires norms too far outside of mainstream norms, it will fail to attract sufficient numbers of shareholders. This appears to reflect the importance of leadership in terms of balancing the compromise between mainstream and sustainability norms, and promoting adaptation as norms begin to change.

## 5. Case study two: Local Exchange Trading Systems

This dissertation assumes that for our societies to function, they must ensure a system of mutual exchange that can be maintained over the long term. Ensuring that the norm of generalised reciprocity is dominant contributes significantly to equitable and efficient collective action to satisfy socioeconomic needs. The alternative, of the dominance of state monetised exchange supported by coercive exchange, is costly and to some extent inefficient (Etzioni, 2002).

Since economism has contributed to the growth of the market and state relative to community, a rebalancing towards the latter is indicated as an important step towards sustainability. As Taylor (2003) notes, community currencies have the potential to facilitate exchange to ‘harness and target collective human effort’ (p 1). Community currencies are a means of addressing a major challenge in harnessing collective effort, of controlling negative exchange, and encouraging our ‘dormant goodwill’ (Taylor, 2003).

This chapter analyses a particular type of community currency called LETS (Local Exchange Trading System) for its potential to foster the four identified sustainability norms. There are at least two ways LETS can foster sustainability norms: directly (the substantive approach) and/or indirectly (the procedural approach). Indirectly they can promote the mechanism of using social disapproval to foster whatever norms the community decides on. They can also directly foster specific norms by employing certain structures and incentives. The focus here is on this direct, substantive capacity of LETS to foster specific sustainability norms. The first section discusses the outcome of a literature review on community currencies of which LETS is one type, including what community currencies are, the different varieties of community currencies, and some of the barriers to their success. The second section introduces the case study of Community Exchange Network Tasmania (CENTs). The third section then applies the framework to the case of CENTs, and also includes some of the findings from the literature as a means of data triangulation. The fourth section provides an interim conclusion on the capacity of LETS to foster sustainability norms.

## Literature review of Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS)

Community currencies, in common with most if not all community initiatives, are said to arise because of unmet human needs (Graugaard, 2009). The market fails to adequately generate the meeting of many basic human needs, in part because national money, as the medium of exchange increasingly relied on to meet these needs, is kept artificially scarce (North, 1999).<sup>93</sup> In addition to being kept artificially scarce, national money is problematic due to being interest and debt-based, and centrally, that is, non-democratically controlled. The definition of a community currency used here is any scheme by which goods and services are traded using a community controlled currency rather than state and market controlled money. This draws on Freire's (2009) definition of community currencies as 'systems created and administered by social groups to effect payments, exchanges, or the transmission of legal monetary obligations among members of a given community' (p 94).

A longer definition is that a community currency is a community managed, bounded, non-scarcity-based, interest free accounting mechanism to directly facilitate exchange to satisfy material needs, which also helps to meet non-material needs. This framing draws on Schraven's (2001: 1) definition of one type of community currency (local exchange trading system) as 'a self-regulating economic network which allows its members to issue and manage their own money supply within a bounded system'. This recognition of a boundary is important; it specifies that those inside the boundary have a special responsibility towards others within the boundary, in essence to use scarce energy to help those (via generalised reciprocity) within the boundary rather than those outside the boundary. The corollary, however, is not that those outside the boundary should not be treated with a lack of respect or empathy, rather that it can be more efficient and ecologically sustainable to form networks of mutual material need satisfaction amongst those physically (and psychologically) closest to us.

Other common terms used for community currencies are complementary currencies (Smith and Seyfang, 2010), parallel currencies (DeMeulenaere, 2000),

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<sup>93</sup> However recent use of quantitative easing may have changed this to a certain extent. See Douthwaite (2012) for a brief discussion of quantitative easing.

local currencies (Colley, 2011), social currencies and social money (Primavera, 2010). The latter two terms highlight one difference between national money and community currencies, whereby building positive social relationships are a focus of many community currencies, as opposed to national money, which focuses more on the production and accumulation of material goods.

Jackson (1997) points out that structurally, community currencies do still act as a form of money. However the crucial difference between money and community currencies is that the latter are controlled by the community. Communities tend to regulate the currency in terms of imposing a limit on the amount that can be accumulated, and the level of debit that can be accrued. In addition, no interest is charged on loans (that is, on extending credit). This is a crucial contrast to 'free market' economics, where it is assumed that people should have the freedom to accumulate as much currency as they wish (Streeck, 2011). Hence community currencies can be called a hybrid between generalised reciprocity and balanced or market exchange.

### *The significance of LETS*

There are at least four points to be made about the significance of LETS in terms of fostering sustainability norms. The first is that LETS projects are essentially based on generalised reciprocity, firstly in terms of mostly being initiated and then managed by those who supply their labour without any expectation of a material return. In other words, they are largely based on volunteer input (Seyfang, 2013). There is much discussion in the literature about the fundamental link between generalised reciprocity and LETS (and community currencies more generally). This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

The second point is that LETS comprises a non-commodified (community) monetary form of exchange. LETS aims to be democratically controlled and to remain committed to the role of money as recording the giving of value to satisfy human needs. Making money from national money when interest is charged circumvents this fundamental principle. Two aspects of modern life that have become normalised are, firstly, attaining most of the satisfiers of our material needs via long supply chains (Stagl, 2002); and secondly, using a state controlled form of money to mediate exchange in these long supply chains. Authors such as Greco

(2009) contend that national money is first and foremost controlled largely non-democratically (Greco, 2009)<sup>94</sup>. For example, banks make decisions about the charging of interest, instead of this being subject to decision making by the broader public. Although likely to be more democratic, community control however is not assumed to result in consistently perfect, 'rational' decisions. Rather it is generally assumed that the community will strive to ensure that most of the needs of its members are met, versus in the conventional monetary system where some individuals are unable to meet their needs. Within the community there can be a heightened sense of interdependence, that the welfare of the individual depends on the welfare of others in the community (Fabricant and Fisher, 2003), and hence community currencies are more likely to be managed to support this interdependence (Nakazato and Hiramoto, 2012).

Thirdly, LETS can help counteract the scarcity of money, in terms of facilitating the meeting of needs that can be met in the community that often may not be met due to a scarcity of money. As Taylor (2003: 2) notes 'it is the organising of collective human effort that has the power to change things'. When money is scarce, it is less capable of organising collective human effort. LETS is based on a literal recording of individual contribution; furthermore as Seyfang (2013) notes, it records 'essential work performed in the non-market economy of informal work, skills exchanges, voluntary activity and domestic labour (which is crucial to a functioning market economy)' (p 67).

A fourth significant point about LETS is that their success depends on the extent to which it is localised such that its members can satisfy each other's basic needs. In other words, success depends on how self-sufficient or self-reliant the exchange is as a whole. Colley (2011) identifies a 'law of local currencies' which refers to this concept. The more that basic needs can be satisfied by the members of the exchange, the more people will use it rather than using monetary exchange. This in turn depends on the level of intra-personal, inter-personal and technical skills possessed by the members.

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<sup>94</sup> However it is also recognised that currently money does play an important role in facilitating beneficial exchange.

To delineate between what is and is not a community currency more broadly, Kichiji and Nishibe (2008) identify four common characteristics of community currencies. These are circulation within relatively small geographical areas or interest communities, non-governmentally issued and managed, non-convertible or of restricted convertibility to the national currency, and either involving no interest or negative interest. A fifth common characteristic could be noted of promoting transactions that otherwise would not occur, linking unused resources to unmet needs (Graugaard 2009).

DeMeulenare (2000) estimates that communities have issued and managed their own currencies for the last 6000 years. However modern community currencies according to Schroeder et al. (2011) can be traced to the work of Robert Owen in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These authors note many experiments emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, related to times of economic crises. There are estimated to be currently approximately 4,000 community currency projects of differing size and structures (Soder, 2008), in more than 80 countries.<sup>95</sup>

Finally Demeulenare (2000) notes how community currencies can adapt to changing conditions. In particular, the potential of community currencies has increased markedly due to the availability of electronic databases and the internet, reflecting a broader view of the transformative potential of information and communication technologies (ICT) (Jones, 1998).<sup>96</sup>

### *Typology*

There does not appear to be any agreement or even much discussion in the literature regarding a typology of community currencies. Brown-Hansen (2015) have however outlined useful one typology. They contend that community currency initiatives can be classed as either a type of LETS (Local Exchange Trading Systems), Business-to-Business (B2B) trading systems, or a type of Timebank. However it is noted that a community currency may be a combination of these, for example, LETS and timebanking.<sup>97</sup> The basic concept common to

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<sup>95</sup> See <http://www.community-exchange.net>.

<sup>96</sup>Bitcoin is one prominent example of non-national money made possible by ICT, that however is not a place-based initiative.

<sup>97</sup> The case study of CENTs is a combination of LETS and Timebanking.

them all is the exchange of goods and services without using legal tender, in other words national money. The first two categories in the typology are based on the concept of mutual credit. Mutual credit refers to the direct and most transparent and rigorous system of recording the value one has provided to others, and the subsequent record that one is owed a return benefit (Greco, 2001). Brown-Hansen (2015) describes 'mutual credit exchange' as the process of individuals directly issuing credit to each other via the provision of goods and services. It could be called 'value banking' or 'value accounting', where an electronic account is kept of the value provided to others, and therefore of how much one is owed.<sup>98</sup> The currency is created when someone provides value to someone else, whereby the giver's account is credited and the receiver's account is debited. The motivation to spend credits on the one hand, and on the other to earn credits to cancel or reduce the debit, forms the means of circulation, or ongoing exchange.

Mutual credit systems can be further divided into two categories. Firstly, there are those schemes that only trade services, or people's time, and value people's time equally, regardless of the level of skill involved. Seyfang and Longhurst (2013) refer to this as service credits, where timebanking is by far the most common model. Lasker et al. (2011) state that in timebanking services are only valued in terms of the time spent doing the work, rather than an arbitrary figure and/or based on market rates which purportedly reflects the skills required. Hence member A could do an hour of lawn mowing for member B, and member C could do an hour of bookkeeping for member A. In this example, member A would have a zero account, member B has one debit, and member C one credit.

A notable feature of timebanking is the use of brokerage to facilitate particularly those who may lack trust in trading with others (Ryan-Collins et al., 2008). Governments are often more likely to provide funding to administer these types of schemes, which then provides extra resources to provide brokerage. Government are perhaps willing to provide funding because of the social benefits, and because

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<sup>98</sup> It can be also be paper based, as was used before the development of information and communication technologies.

the main services provided are generally low skilled, which are not likely to result in a substantial loss of taxation revenue for the government (Seyfang, 2001).<sup>99</sup>

The other main type of mutual credit system is the Local Exchange Trading System<sup>100</sup> (LETS), which involves the trading of goods as well as services, where people's time is valued more conventionally according to the level of skill involved. The currency is again created by the provision of value as in timebanking, but labour can be differentially valued, and goods can be traded as well as services. While Brown-Hansen (2016) identify Business to Business as the third main type of community currency, I do not include this as a community currency since it is based on businesses trading without money, rather than communities. Instead I identify paper-based community currencies as the third category. Instead of having an internet account as commonly used for the previous two types, a community prints its own currency to be used instead of national money. These systems are relatively successful at engaging businesses, such as 'Ithaca Hours' in the United States (Jacob et al., 2004). Some of these schemes may permit convertibility to the national currency which tends to encourage their use.

Within each category there exists a wide variation in how the initiatives are structured. For example Schraven (2001) notes one point of difference whereby initiatives can range from 'libertarian designs with little centralisation' to schemes based on strong centralised management. The focus of this research is the LETS system, which has socioeconomic benefits in promoting greater economic activity as well as the focus on increased social interaction. The barriers that are noted next tend to refer more to LETS than the other two types of community currencies, however the first two barriers are common to all types.

### *Barriers*

Three factors are noted here in particular as important barriers to the success of LETS. The first is that as Leyshon (1997) notes, the 'middle-class nature of some LETS means that they are off-putting, if not alienating, to those who would most benefit from them' (p 124). Likewise Williams (2002) notes a general trend of a

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<sup>99</sup> This is a challenge for community currencies which focus more on economic outcomes, to avoid government concern about a loss of taxation revenue. See Seyfang (2001).

<sup>100</sup> LETS is also referred to as Local Energy Trading System.



reluctance to join any group seen as mainly comprised of those from a different socioeconomic class. He contends in particular that people find it easier to ask for a favour, that is, initiate a trade, when they know they can pay it back. If an individual lacks confidence in their ability to provide value to others, they will tend to not participate in LETS. Participation in LETS therefore tends to be dominated by more or less economically advantaged individuals, or at least those with self-confidence in their own general abilities. It should be noted, however, that it is advantageous to have individuals who are able to forego earning conventional currency and instead earn community currency.

Secondly, Colley (2011) highlights that the success of LETS is strongly related to the quantity and quality of what can be provided locally, as previously mentioned. He proposes a 'law of local currencies', where the amount of economic activity facilitated by a local or community currency cannot be greater than the extent of the self-sufficiency of the community. Community self-sufficiency then in part defines the limits of the spread of LETS. Colley (2011) notes further that in the current era of specialisation and globalisation, perhaps on average most communities can provide for only 5% of needs. The corollary is that attention must be paid to increasing the supply of locally produced goods and services. Barnes (2015) agrees in stating that a 'major challenge remains the relocalisation of 'stuff of life' transactions - food, energy, and housing in particular. Perhaps 90% of spend on these items quickly leaves a local economy' (no pg). He also points to the common problem of an excess of the provision of some types of services, such as alternative therapies, and a shortage of others, such as trades people.

This leads to the question of brokerage and intervention more generally to increase the capacity of people to trade locally. Brokerage can add significantly to the likely success of community currencies (Collom, 2005), however there is a tension between members being too reliant on brokers and not using their own initiative to seek out either other members to fulfil their needs, or find people who want the goods and services they can supply. The other view is that where people still have habits of satisfying their needs via the conventional monetary system, every assistance and encouragement is needed and should be given to change these habits. Ultimately, however, if brokerage is to be used, the resources must be found to provide it, either on a volunteer basis, or from external funding.

This is a factor that must be considered in improving the chances of building a strong community currency initiative. These factors do impact on the capacity of LETS initiatives to foster sustainability norms.

The next section describes the on-ground example of a LETs and timebank hybrid, called Community Exchange Network Tasmania (CENTs), from which data was generated for this dissertation.

### Community Exchange Network Tasmania (CENTs) case study

In a similar process to the commencement of the North-West Tasmanian CSA, the Community Exchange Network Tasmania (CENTs) project began with external funding to help start the project in 2011. I was motivated to start the project having been involved in a similar initiative in Victoria, so was able to see first hand the (particularly social) benefits of this type of initiative. The funding was from a grant from Skills Tasmania, the state government body responsible for the administration of vocational education and training in Tasmania (which is an island state of Australia). Skills Tasmania was interested in the potential of LETS to increase the employability skills of those registered as unemployed, and therefore receiving a government 'unemployment benefit'.<sup>101</sup> This original aim co-existed with a broader aim of gaining the wider socioeconomic benefits of LETS. The LETS model was chosen because of its combined emphasis on economic benefits, that is, the trading of goods, as well as social benefits. There is a diversity of software programs and established systems that have emerged to help groups to start and maintain a LETS initiative. After some research it was decided that one particular initiative, the global 'Community Exchange System (CES)' showed the most promise in the features that it provided.<sup>102</sup> The capacity of the CES to facilitate trading between initiatives around the world, for example, was one feature that many others did not offer.<sup>103</sup> The size of the Community Exchange System is indicated by the statistics that there are currently 38,317 users in 785 more or less active groups in 80 countries.<sup>104</sup> The CES amounts in some respect to a social movement,

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<sup>101</sup> Tasmania has a relatively high number of people dependent on state pensions. See Gardner et al (1979).

<sup>102</sup> Other popular alternatives include Cyclos and Community Forge (see Brown -Hansen 2015).

<sup>103</sup> As will be discussed, this capacity does tend to reduce the extent to which LETS is based on localisation.

<sup>104</sup> See <https://www.community-exchange.org/>.

with increasing communication beginning to occur between individuals and groups associated with the CES.<sup>105</sup>

The description of CENTs on the CENTs website<sup>106</sup> can be paraphrased as follows. CENTs is a volunteer run LETS network operating throughout the state of Tasmania. It is based on people trading their goods, services and skills with one another without money. CENTs also operates as a form of ‘gift economy’ (and towards the ‘collaborative economy’) where people give things away for free or they can also swap, barter, loan, and share with others. In other words, the database used allows the listing of goods and services that people want to give away for free, swap or loan.

CENTs aims to create a mutually supportive network of people helping each other. Members can help other people in a large variety of ways. Examples include gardening, home help, baby sitting, office work, providing transport or by teaching someone a new skill (see Table 4 for an indication of the goods and services that CENTs members offer). Members can access services they otherwise may not have been able to afford. Before a prospective member registers for an account, they must be able to identify at least one ‘Offer’, in terms of one good or service they can provide to someone else.<sup>107</sup> It is not mandatory but is advisable to also identify a ‘Want’, in terms of a good or service they would like from someone else.<sup>108</sup>

After registering for an account each member receives an account number and a password. CENTs works like an on-line banking service. Participants can view their current balance and can also see the trading position of others, so there is a much greater amount of transparency than in the conventional monetary system. Goods and services are listed on the database through an ‘Offerings List’. Participants browse this list to find goods or services they wish to purchase. Once they have identified what they want they contact the seller to request the good or service. If

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<sup>105</sup>For example, the founder of the CES system, Tim Jenkins, who lives in South Africa has visited Australia a number of times recently, including attending the 2015 Australian LETS conference.

<sup>106</sup> See <http://www.nwcents.org/>.

<sup>107</sup> As will be discussed, this requirement currently precludes those who cannot offer a good or service from participating, and is an issue that needs to be addressed to enable CENTs to be more equitable.

<sup>108</sup> An interesting tendency is for people to either list no Wants at all, or only one. This can be due to a combination of perceiving they are unlikely to be able to satisfy particular wants via CENTs, and/or a reluctance to identify their Wants in the first place.

the transaction goes ahead, the seller then enters the transaction into the system, which credits the account of the seller and debits that of the buyer. CENTs aims to publish a quarterly newsletter and organises regular trading and other events for the community to not only trade, but also interact socially.

CENTs is free to join, however a four per cent levy is deducted from all transactions conducted via CENTs. This to some extent funds the costs of administration, in particular for database management. While CENTs is essentially a LETS type of community currency, it borrows one important feature from timebanking. This is equality of the rate charged by members for their time, regardless of the person's skill level or requirements of the work. This is, however, a recommendation rather than being mandatory. While most members do adhere to this policy, as will be discussed, some do not.

The governance structure of the CENTs project is based on a team comprised of a central administrator who oversees the whole project, and local area coordinators in each major trading area, of which currently there are ten across Tasmania. The main tasks of the central administrator is to approve new registration requests, to monitor account balances, to act as an overall broker in matching people who request particular goods and services with people who can provide the good or service, to facilitate publicity, and to oversee the Local Area Coordinators. The main tasks of the Local Area Coordinators are to act as local contacts, recruit new members, organize trading and social events, and perform a level of brokerage, depending on time availability. However members are generally expected to organise their own trading by utilising the database which lists both Offers and Wants. In recognition of the importance of social interaction, social events are held by most trading areas approximately three times a year, on average therefore there can be up to twelve social events held during the year around Tasmania. These events are predominantly organised as trading events, where members bring goods to trade and share a meal. However, recently some events have included an element of 'political activism' in, for example, showing topical documentary films. One advantage of the CES database is that it provides statistics relating to aspects such as trading levels, numbers of new members joining per location and so on. The statistics for CENTs show that 64% of the members have traded at least once,

therefore 36% have not traded.<sup>109</sup> Since the start of the project, there have been an average of 3 trades per day, or 21 trades per week. The average value of each trade has been 40 Cents (which equates to A\$40). Since the start of the project 140,000 Cents has been traded, with the record for the most numbers of trades in one month (in November 2013) when there were 194 trades worth an average of 43 Cents each. Over the four years that the project has been operating (from April 2012 to current), there has been somewhat of a peak of activity according to the number of recorded transactions in 2013 and 2014, with 2015 showing a lower level of activity than the previous two years. However this does not necessarily indicate that the project is in decline, it may mean there is increased exchange of goods and services which is not being recorded. This is after all the ultimate aim of increasing norms of giving without formally recording a transaction. This would however require specific research to ascertain if this is the case.

With regards to what goods and services are offered within CENTs, the following table (Table 4) shows the number of people who have an offer in each category. Unfortunately there are no statistics readily available on how many trades actually occur in each category.

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<sup>109</sup>Sometimes individuals join CENTs with intentions of trading, but do not trade which could be for a number of reasons such as a lack of demand for the goods and/or services they are offering, others may join without fully realising what is involved and fail to trade.

Table 4: Categories of Offers and respective numbers of Offers by CENTs members as at 25th January 2016

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Number of Offers</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>Number of Offers</i>
Food & drink	60	Care and assistance	11
Gardening/agriculture	44	Babies/children	9
Advice and tuition	26	Artisans and specialists	8
Arts and crafts	24	Goods - new	7
Books and publications	24	Trades	7
Accommodation	22	Business services	6
Alternative therapies	20	Labour and assistance	6
Professional services	20	Educational	5
Recycled/second hand	20	Furniture	4
Transport	18	Media & advertising	4
Body and mind	16	Companionship	1
Computer/IT	15	Motor vehicle	1

I participated both as a CENTs organiser and as a trader from the beginning. I have since participated in six trading events, given three public presentations about the project, and participated in an online forum of the group of coordinators who run the project<sup>110</sup>, and observed and contributed to two CENTs facebook pages (one for general members, and one for coordinators). In addition, data was obtained from the Community Exchange database. The database is the means by which members

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<sup>110</sup> There are ten 'local area coordinators' and one state coordinator who together manage the project.

list their 'offers' and 'wants', record credits and debits, and find other people who can satisfy their 'wants'.

The main things I observed included what people were trading, what type of interactions people had via CENTs, what were the factors that appeared to increase people's involvement, and what decreased their involvement.

I presented a paper at the 2013 Complementary Currency Conference in The Hague, the Netherlands, which was attended by a substantial number of the leading authors critiquing conventional monetary systems and advocating for practical ways of democratising money.

### Interviewee comments

The interviews that were conducted as part of a project to evaluate CENTs aimed to capture the lessons that can be learned from the project to benefit both the future of CENTs, and to guide other LETS and similar initiatives, and to make a preliminary evaluation of the contribution of CENTs to social sustainability. The following comments relate to a number of aspects relevant to understanding the potential of CENTs to foster sustainability norms.

The first comments quoted reflected the three themes of Hoeben (2003) that the motivation to participate in LETS can be classed as economic, social or ideology related. A number of comments indicated motivations relating to ideology such as the following three comments:

I have more hope in humanity and for the future of humanity that there are a lot of people out there who are tired of the capitalist system and are looking for a better way. Embracing a concept like CENTs is important as we find a new way to move towards a new sort of lifestyle. It is a way of developing an alternative money system and more cohesive resilient community for when times become very hard (R3).

Despite it being a major controlling factor in most peoples' lives, I believe many of the problems we face are not due to a lack of money but because it exists. Poverty, Most crimes, Homelessness, Hunger, and other symptoms of a traditional economy would be minimal to non-existent in an economy based on community association and sharing of resources. CENTs and the community exchange concept in general is the perfect system for living in a society without money (R2)

I have tried to explain to others to me it represents the transition between the capitalist system that we are in at the moment that doesn't appear to be working and that beautiful place where we hope to be one day where

everyone does everything for nothing for one another and we live happily ever after. We all know that in the real world there is that imbalance where some are takers and some are givers and it's nice to be able to keep reins on that until everyone reaches a point of higher consciousness where that no longer is the case. It would be a Utopia of sorts for me. It is a good social tool. I haven't used it very much or as much as I would have liked but I have seen the potential for connections with more people (R3).

A large number of comments mentioned social benefits from their CENTs membership, such as:

I think the personal interactions of Trade Days like the Open Days and the personal interaction that accompanies trading with people in my community (R4).

It is really handy for someone like me who is still new to Tasmania as I have benefited from the social connections that CENTs offers. I would recommend CENTs to all new residents moving into CENTs areas as a way to connect to the local people and also to find like minded people (R3)

Other comments combined two or all three of the different motivations. The following two comments refers to both social and economic aspects. Both were in response to a question regarding the benefit of CENTs:

Sourcing amazing produce, meeting new people... becoming involved in community, meeting like minded people. I like the idea that everyone has something to offer, and can be economically included and linked into a community (R7).

We are new to the area so CENTs provided us with a way of meeting others. We are always keen to source and eat local produce -for health and environment reasons as well as support others to be economically active (R7)

Likewise economic and ideology themes were reflected in the following:

There is a huge imbalance in the economy where we have a whole sector of people working and a whole sector of people unemployed then there is this other sector of people volunteering so working without pay who are doing great work in the community. This is where the capitalist system is out of balance. If CENTs can effect a better balance between the two polarisations then it is absolutely the way forward (R3)

Another comment combined elements of all three views, and highlighted the benefits of formal systems of accounting:

When I thought of CENTs as another system of exchange it doesn't come out in a very positive light as it seems to me that you are limited for the things you can get back as opposed to your dollars money so in that respect it is not as valuable as working for real dollars. I wasn't getting paid \$25/hr anyway in the normal monetary system and when I stopped looking at CENTs



as a substitute for money but as a complimentary system to the normal monetary system I decided it was good way of keeping check on all the things we do for one another for no money. I often feel that I am out of balance one way or the other in terms of the things I do for others or things they do for me and so to be able to have that system of checks is really a good thing as I don't have to worry about that (R3).

This dissertation has identified time stress as one challenge for CSIs. A number of respondents indicated this was a factor inhibiting their participation, whereby in response to the question of barriers to participation the answer included:

Time constraints and competing priorities are a big factor for me as I have limited time and some things just don't get done (R5).

I have a very long list of things I need to get to and once I can find some more time I will start to advertise through CENTs to get help with things I need done (R5).

Similarly the following comment was from an interviewee who was aware of CENTs but has chosen not to join. In answer to the question of why the interviewee had decided not to join, the response was

It is a question of time commitment and I am reticent to become involved due to time (R1).

These comments reflect one barrier peculiar to LETS in terms of confidence in offering goods and services to others, and requesting them from others. The second barrier of lack of discretionary time is a common obstacle for involvement in CSIs in general.

A number of the comments highlighted that for some people, identifying things of value they could provide that others may benefit from was a problem. Similarly there was a difficulty in identifying what they needed that could be supplied by other members. This is a fundamental barrier since the whole initiative relies on members offering goods and services to others, and seeking to have their needs met by others. One example is:

I have a very limited number of offerings and no really for Wants. Wants change daily and so it is harder to think about what you may need on a day to day basis or into the future (R4)

This indicates in part resistance to sourcing satisfiers locally rather than anonymously via the market. Another similar comment was:

I do have trouble identifying Wants although in saying that I haven't actually thought about what I want and so I haven't identified wants yet. I generally

find that when I want something I want it now, and don't have the time to list it on CENTs as I need to go to the supermarket for example to get it straight away. For things that I don't need immediately I could probably list those but I haven't thought about it (R3)

This points to the possibility of having a CENTs 'supermarket' or store where members can go when they need goods or services and don't have time to list them on CENTs.

Other comments however tended to illustrate a somewhat contrary view such as:

I have always thought we all have talents we could put to use by helping others (R2).

This illustrates the diversity of attitudes that members have in relation to the offering and requesting of goods and services.

The next section applies the framework to conduct an analysis of the potential of LETS to foster sustainability norms.

### Applying the framework

In applying the framework, two ratings are given for each criteria. The first rating refers to an analysis of the potential of the ideal form of LETS. The second rating analyses LETS in how it is actually being practiced. Both ratings are based on data from the literature, from participant observation of the CENTs project and from my attendance at three annual Australian LETS conferences in 2013, 2014 and 2015, and an international conference in 2013. Table 5 gives a rating for the indicators for the four norms for LETS, Table 6 gives a summary of the findings, showing the rating for both the ideal LETS model, and how it tends to be practised.

Table 5: Ratings or indicators for Local Exchange Trading Schemes (LETS)

Sustainability Norms	Indicators	Ideal	Practice
1. Reciprocity	1.1 Volunteering	High-medium	Low -medium
	1.2 Dominant exchange type	High	High
2. Equity	2.1 Redistribution	Low- medium	Low
3. Efficiency	3.1 Localisation	High	High
	3.2 Dematerialisation	High	Medium-high
4. Deliberation	4.1 Purposeful social interaction	Medium-high	Medium
	4.2 Prosumption	Medium - high	Medium

Table 6: Summary of Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS) ratings

Criteria	Ideal	Practice
Generalised reciprocity	High	Medium
Equity	Low-medium	Low
Efficiency	High	Medium to high
Deliberation	Medium to high	Medium

### Generalised reciprocity

#### Ideal

There is a substantial discourse in the literature pointing to a common identification of generalised reciprocity as a major goal of LETS initiatives. Some examples of authors who identify this connection include Freire (2009) who states, 'the essential characteristic of social currencies is (or ought to be) reciprocity' (p

82). Greco (2001) contends with regards to LETS, that '[t]he primary objective, after all, is to foster the development of mutually supportive relationships'(p 72). Likewise Schroeder (2011) contends that reciprocity is of fundamental importance to community currencies, where the balance between giving and taking among its participants 'creates a community'. In the same vein Cahn (1999) states that 'the obligation to repay is backed by a moral norm of reciprocity rather than a legal norm of coercion' (p 501). He contends timebanking reinforces the norm of generalised reciprocity, rewards altruism, and builds trust among strangers. Soder (2008: 28) contends that '[c]ooperation is more likely in simple exchange settings', and since LETS tend to involve less complexity than conventional monetary systems, in this respect LETS can promote cooperative norms. Finally Ryan-Collins et al. (2008) contend that community currencies provide incentives for people to 'reconnect with each other' and can revive the 'core economy' of families and communities which cannot operate without a minimum level of generalised reciprocity, of giving to others in one's family or close community without the expectation of a direct return. These quotes all reflect the extent to which generalised reciprocity is a foundational norm at least in the ideal of LETS. LETS promotes communal relationships of proximity and regular interaction which greatly promote relationships of generalised reciprocity.

With regards to the indicator of volunteering, this provides the core source of labour in organising LETS projects. There are substantial opportunities to volunteer in a management, support and/or brokerage role. Marketing and publicity and general organisational skills are two important areas where volunteers are required to help initiatives to build the number of members, and to expand trading.

The rating given for the ideal potential of LETS to foster the norm of generalised reciprocity was high therefore owing to generalised reciprocity being one of the main underlying aims, and for providing significant opportunities for volunteers. Furthermore since ongoing external funding is very difficult to obtain, administration and organisational roles must be performed by volunteers. It is noted that having a paid coordinator can increase the effectiveness of LETS projects, however this does not detract from the argument that LETS has a high potential to mobilise volunteering and hence generalised reciprocity.

Rating: High

## Practice

LETS does require a certain amount of input of time to start a new initiative. It takes time to research the different types of software available, and then begin to market the project to others to gain a minimum level of interest necessary to start a LETS initiative. Management of the database, in which the details of each trader are recorded, their Offers and Wants, and the credits and debits for each account, is crucial to the success of any LETS. While the CES system aims to be as self-governing as possible (each member records their own transactions, and keeps their own Offers and Wants up to date), to ensure enough trading occurs to keep the system going requires a minimum level of more or less centralised management. In addition, time is required to attend to other aspects such as recruiting new members, organizing publicity, organising trading and social events, managing the structure of Local Area Coordinators and so on. In other words, a substantial level of volunteering is required (or much more rarely a reasonable amount of funding has to be obtained).

The positions of Local Area Coordinators are perhaps the most obvious opportunity for volunteering within CENTs. To date there has been a reasonably strong number of CENTs volunteers willing to fill these roles, albeit often only performing the minimum role of acting as a contact for their local area. Wider implicit and explicit calls for volunteering however have elicited minimal response. This polarization seems to be fairly typical of community initiatives more generally, and highlights the crucial aspect of sustainability leadership. In other words, those who volunteer to manage community initiatives are one of the most important success factors in community initiatives.<sup>111</sup>

Part of the power of LETS is that it can be seen in one sense as an almost unlimited source of job creation. In theory unemployment could cease to exist via the use of LETS. What would often be volunteer roles could be remunerated by LETS currency. This does happen in the CENTs project, where for example the main coordinator is paid for eight hours a week in the CENTs currency (although she

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<sup>111</sup> In turn managing 'leadership burnout' and succession planning is crucial for long term survival of CSIs.

works more than double that in the role). There is however a blurred line between volunteering and 'working' for CENTs. Working for CENTs does amount to working with the aim of gaining a material benefit for oneself, rather than pure volunteering where there is no expectation of a material gain (although there is assumed to be an element of non-material motivation) . However earning CENTs currency is different to earning money in that CENTs is a 'special purpose' money (Seyfang and Longhurst, 2013) which can only be used for whatever can be provided by the community, invariably credits and debits cannot be accrued without limit, and interest is not charged on negative balances.<sup>112</sup> These factors make LETs currency a hybrid type of money, being controlled by the community, means the problems of national money of being used as a tool for material wealth creation can be avoided (Greco, 2001).

Finally, as was mentioned, there is the capacity to list one's goods and services for free on the CENTs database. Currently there are two listings from two different members for free services, and approximately six listings for free goods in the database. On the one hand this gives an indication of some level of generalised reciprocity, but on the other hand it could be much higher. However I observed also that there was a level of free giving occurring without recording anything on the database, such as at trading events, but the extent that this occurs is difficult to estimate. According to Taylor (2003), this is the very essence of the capacity of community currencies to increase cooperation: that people move from wanting to receive an explicit material benefit in return for contributing to satisfying the needs of others, to contributing with no such explicit expectations.

Generally, however, I have observed in CENTs that there is something of a lack of people offering their time to help others (whether due to a literal lack of time, lack of skills that others require, or other reasons). Rather than offering their time, many people only offer goods, such as second hand goods. This indicates to some extent that in practice norms other than generalised reciprocity may exist, and/or members may have competing priorities that make offering their time difficult.

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<sup>112</sup> Decided on by the management team.

With regards to the broader LETS literature, there is explicit mention of LETS having the effect of increasing generalised reciprocity. For example Taylor (2003) states 'I have been witness to people joining DRLETS, and via trading, meeting 'like-minded people', and developing a social network that no longer requires points to be recorded. If the only reason to create an alternative currency is to promote mutuality, then, in many ways, not needing to use points is the goal' (p 3). However other reports such as provided by Dittmer (2013) express a negative view of the capacity of community currencies to sufficiently promote generalised reciprocity.

The CENTs interviews showed a clear link between being able to interact on a face to face basis with members, and the amount of trust they felt. The other factor was institutional trust, the level of belief that management could ensure negative exchange was minimised.

In relation to whether the interviewees thought that CENTs members could be trusted, R3 stated:

I would say 90% because the type of people who are inclined to be involved in CENTs are of the philosophy that is more trusting and therefore more trustworthy and people who are dishonest in CENTs are more than likely to be found out because it is a small community.

The interviews of members of the CENTs project did reveal a perception that CENTs did have a positive effect on social relationships. Some of the relevant comments were:

I would be friendlier towards a CENTs trader because they are there more on a voluntary basis rather than someone turning up to get a pay check so maybe they come to my home with a different attitude and different motivation ... If they have a vested interest like the Administrator and Coordinators then I think you would have a higher level of trust about them because they run the program and will go that extra mile for you ...People need to meet each other and have face to face contact to establish a relationship and trust will grow from that. (R5).

The same respondent mentioned further regarding the possibility of exchange via conditional reciprocity converting to generalised reciprocity once traders got to know each other, precisely one important the means by which LETS initiatives can increase generalised reciprocity.

I wonder whether as you trade more the lines become more blurred in terms of as you build friendships with people does that mean people are more

inclined to say “just take it” rather than LETS put it through as a transaction on CENTS. I’m thinking about the trader who needs baby sitting for her diabetic child. We both need this same service and so I would imagine we would become friends as we are going to one another’s house and caring for each others kids so you can’t help but establish a friendship. I wouldn’t like to see her get stuck for a sitter (R5).

Another respondent more directly expressed a pre-existing preference for generalised reciprocity:

I have always been motivated by being able to help others achieve their goals and by doing so I achieve mine. Zig Ziglar is quoted as saying “We can have anything we want in life if we just help enough other people get what they want” and I like to live my life by that (R2).

Due to the two dynamics where there is some evidence of a norm of generalised reciprocity, which on the other hand could be higher, a medium rating was given due to the ‘medium’ level of volunteering.

Rating: Medium

## Equity

### Ideal

Four mechanisms of redistribution were identified for LETS. The first was a direct means by which those with excess credits could donate these to those who had insufficient credits to meet their needs. The second is the extent to which the principle of equality of the rate charged per hour of time is adhered to. In the conventional economy, there is a large differential in the amount people receive per hour, which makes a significant contribution to some being unable to satisfy basic needs, and other receiving substantially more than needed for a comfortable standard living. The third mechanism was the use of maximum debits and credits that can be accrued. Maximum debits acts as a control against negative exchange, by limiting the amount that people can receive from others without giving back. A maximum on the amount that can accrued in effect prevents the accumulation of material wealth. Those who are approaching the maximum must either spend their credits, or donate them to others. Fourthly, the inherent nature of LETS as a currency in terms of not charging interest on debt, providing ‘employment’ opportunities for those who have problems engaging in conventional employment



can increase the extent to which who lack access to resources in the conventional economy can satisfy their needs.

The literature largely does not mention in general that LETS acts as a tool for redistribution. In fact Taylor (2003) specifically states that LETS themselves are not a mechanism for redistribution, but that they could fulfil that role if specific policies were enacted. With regards to direct redistribution, certainly it is structurally possible in most LETS for transfers to be made from those who have more credits in their account than they need, to those who have less, or are not able to earn any credits. It is largely not however seen as an explicit role of LETS to act as a formal means of redistribution. A major barrier more fundamentally is the requirement for members to be able to offer a good or service to register, whereby often the reason someone is unable to offer a good or service is because they lack resources to do so. This currently detracts from the ability of CENTs to redistribute resources.

With regards to equality of rates ('wage equality'), some LETS initiatives do use the timebanking principle of an hour of one person's time being worth exactly the same as an hour of anyone else's (Cahn, 1999). In theory, this contributes substantially to the norm of equity. The use of maximum debit and credit limits is a common feature of LETS initiatives. At all the Australian LETS annual conferences I have attended, this issue is commonly discussed mainly in terms of the level that the maximums should be set at. In conclusion, LETS has a low to medium level of potential in its ideal form to foster the norm of equity. On the one hand they do not have a history of facilitating redistribution, on the other hand they can provide a means of addressing a substantial source of inequity in ability to meet basic needs, of the huge variations in the payments people receive for their time.<sup>113</sup>

Rating: Low— medium

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<sup>113</sup> Recognising the norm of linking remuneration with 'merit', which however tends in part to reflect cumulative advantage, whereby access to one set of advantages, such as a money, gives access to many other advantages, which does not necessarily arise from merit, see DiPrete and Eirich, 2006.

## Practice

In line with the general trend of other LETS initiatives, CENTs does not specifically facilitate redistribution in terms of transfers or subsidies. However there is stringent policing of the maximum debit and credit limits. A monthly check is conducted by the central coordinator of members who are approaching either limit. These members are then contacted to discuss either how they can earn credits to reduce debits, or spend or donate credits when there has been too many credits accumulated. The option of donating credits is not actively promoted, perhaps because of the other more urgent asks of building the project. Members who do build up large credits however are generally told of this option. Generally members who do start to approach the limit of what they are allowed to accrue (which is currently set at 2,000 CENTs, equivalent to 2,000 Australian dollars) seek instead to spend their credits to reduce the balance in their account. There has been a minor discussion regarding whether greater efforts should be put towards facilitating the transfer of credits from those who have excess to those may need them, but other priorities have prevented the making of a decision to develop a relevant policy and actively promote this possibility. As was mentioned previously, prospective members must be able to identify at least one thing they can offer as a good or service to others before they can register. This current requirement does not allow someone to register who cannot offer a good or service, the very group who may benefit from redistribution.

With regards to 'wage equity', CENTs does attempt to impose equality of the rate charged for labour of 25 Cents per hour, however this policy is not generally policed. Some do charge less than the recommended rate (for example 15 Cents per hour for teaching how to crochet and 19 Cents for general labouring) and a larger number charge more (for example 45 Cents per hour for property maintenance and 50 Cents for website design). The view from management is that it will take some members time to adapt to this policy (and some may never adapt) and enforcing it stringently could lead many with higher levels of skills to not participate if equality was mandatory.

A low-to-medium rating was given for LETS in practice due to on the one hand the extent to which the equality of time is adhered to, but on the other hand it is not

universally followed, and there is little evidence of systematic transfers from those who can easily accumulate credits to those who have less capacity to earn credits.

Rating: low — medium

## Efficiency

### Ideal

The first indicator of equity is localisation -while it is recognised that localisation has its limits as an indicator for efficiency, it at least highlights the reduction of the use of resources in transporting goods from large distances. It also highlights the restriction of consumption to those goods and services that can be provided locally. One element of the limitation of localisation as an indicator for LETS is that its effectiveness depends on how much members satisfy their needs within LETS versus in the conventional economy. The point is however that localisation is an important underlying core component of LETS generally, hence it can result in a reduction of use of resources to transport goods and services over long distances.

An important aim of LETS initiatives is to encourage people to consume as much as possible of goods and services that can be provided within the community. This of course does not preclude in any way people from consuming more than they need, but to the extent they satisfy their needs via a community currency, an element of ‘making do’ with what is available locally is a foundational norm. A caveat on the potential of localisation to promote norms of efficiency is that in some respects there may paradoxically be some inefficiencies (increased use of resources) such as occur due to low economies of scale (Hauwermeiren et al., 2007).<sup>114</sup>

With regards to dematerialisation, for LETS resource sharing is one way this can be achieved, by which the resources used for the satisfaction of needs can be reduced. As Seyfang and Longhurst (2013) note, the philosophy of LETS includes an explicit intention to promote the sharing of resources rather than individual ownership, including facilitating the reuse of resources. Second hand goods are

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<sup>114</sup> This is debated within for example the local foods literature where there is a trade-off between the energy used to grow food in a particular locality and the energy used to transport it. For example growing tomatoes in a heated glasshouse is energy intensive but if supplied locally reduces energy for transport. See Hauwermeiren et al (2007).

commonly traded rather than new goods. The availability of goods and services which may be considered as constituting, for example, luxury consumption is also very limited.

In conclusion, a high rating is given to the potential of the ideal form of LETS to foster the norm of efficiency, in terms of promoting consumption of goods and services which have a lower material input. Both indicators have the potential to promote a reduction of the resources used for the production and distribution of goods and services versus 'consumption from afar'.<sup>115</sup>

Rating; high

### Practice

With regards to the first indicator of efficiency of localisation, most trading is conducted within each of the three regions of Tasmania, of the South, the North, and the North-West. However CENTs does service a relatively large region (the whole state of Tasmania), and does allow inter-trading with other states of Australia and overseas. CENTs therefore can be seen as fostering the norm of efficiency to the extent trading is local, but with limits due to inter-trading. With regards to the second indicator of dematerialisation in the form of resource sharing and reuse of resources, there are significant levels of both within CENTs. An investigation of the goods and services offered and observation of the trading that occurs at trading days in particular reveals a significant level of recycling and reuse.

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<sup>115</sup> Akin to McMichael's (2003) concept of 'Food from Nowhere'.

Table 7: Examples of local goods and services traded

<i>Date</i>	<i>Trader Acc.no</i>	<i>Description of trade</i>	<i>Credit</i>	<i>Debit</i>
18 Jan 2016	CENT0381 -	Garlic - 2.5kg	15.00	0.60
24 Jan 2016	CENT0161	Childcare 2.25 hours		56.25
24 Jan 2016	CENT0413	Ford Transit van - motor needs repairs	600.00	
24 Jan 2016	CENT0413	Gardening assistance - 8 days x 3 hours		600.00
15 Feb 2016	CENT0026	2 x Jeans		70.00
19 Mar 2016	CENT0080	1 Dozen (Blue & Regular) Free-Range Chemical Free		6.00
19 Mar 2016	CENT0080	1 Dozen Free-Range Chemical Free Lovely Hen Eggs		5.00
19 Mar 2016	CENT0080	2 Pairs Ladies Jeans		10.00
19 Mar 2016	CENT0080	Handmade "Sunlight" Laundry Soap		2.00
19 Mar 2016	CENT0080	Portable Mini Speaker		5.00
20 Mar 2016	CENT0027	Clothes x 3		3.00
20 Mar 2016	CENT0381	Gladioli	24.00	
20 Mar 2016	CENT0165	Gladioli	32.00	
20 Mar 2016	CENT0230	Worm juice		4.50
21 Mar 2016	CENT0381	Apple cider vinegar and Kombucha starter 10c each		20.00
23 Mar 2016	CENT0045	Dissertation editing		400.00
24 Mar 2016	CENT0129	Wheat - 260 kgs	104.00	
27 Mar 2016	CENT0026	Rhubarb x 2		6.00

Table 7 shows examples of trading conducted through CENTs (this is from my own account). All the goods are second hand goods, and virtually all the food is locally grown (although it is unknown as to the original source of Kombucha starter). More generally there is certainly an element of shared understanding of efficiency

within the CENTs project. For example, two recently well-attended forums co-sponsored by CENTs focused on the concept of the 'sharing economy', and on home energy efficiency. Conrad (2013) contends that the recent interest in the concept of the sharing economy amounts to an 'economic revolution', where access rather than ownership of resources is becoming increasingly important. On the other hand I have also observed that there may be somewhat of a tendency to perceive that 'any trading is good trading', regardless of the material intensity of the goods and services consumed. Relatedly, CENTs credits may be perceived as 'free' and hence used for items that one would not normally spend conventional money on. Gomez (Gómez, 2012) discusses this phenomenon in relation to a large LETS type initiative in Argentina. In summary, in practice for CENTs at least there is generally a strong capacity to foster norms of efficiency via localisation, and sharing, recycling and reusing of resources, with however other factors such as the ability for inter-trading detracting somewhat from this potential.

Rating: Medium — High

## Deliberation

### Ideal

On the one hand, the LETS literature does not reference deliberation as an explicit aim of LETS. On the other hand, it does have a focus on increased social interaction, being a necessary precursor of deliberation. This social interaction can be called 'purposeful' since it occurs via economic activity, in terms of the processes of the provision of goods and services. This is likely to lead to greater opportunities for deliberation.

There are two main ways that LETS can facilitate purposeful social interaction and hence promote deliberation. The first is via face to face social interaction, which as was previously discussed is often deemed as the most effective method of deliberation. This can occur during the course of everyday trading, and/or via social events. The second is via electronic means, possibly via the same software that the CENTs database is based on. For example there is the capacity for members to register as part of an interest group, such as related to cooking and

preserving, or woodworking. In this way people can become connected via a specific purpose.

With regards to prosumption, whereby prosumers may gain increased knowledge and capacity to engage in deliberation, this is a fundamental basis of LETS. The success of any LETS project is related directly to the capacity of the members to provide goods and services to others. Ideally therefore, LETS members should be prosumers as much as possible, where a 'can do' attitude is perhaps one of the most valuable skills members can possess.

A medium-to-high rating is given here due on the one hand to a lack of pre-existing norms of deliberation, but on the other hand to the structural capacity to facilitate deliberation via face to face interaction, electronically or both. And importantly, LETS is explicitly based on promoting the role of prosumption.

Rating: Medium — high

### Practice

There is an element of deliberation that occurs in the management of CENTs, mainly at the management level. Initially a web-based collaboration tool called 'Wiggio' was used to facilitate discussion between the main coordinator and the local area coordinators about CENTs policies. At the same time a social networking (Facebook) page had been set up by a member to facilitate communication in general between all members. It was then decided after difficulties some local area coordinators had with using Wiggio, to change to using Facebook as the main tool for deliberation at the management level. In addition, in 2015 a two-day face-to-face 'conference' was held in Southern Tasmania consisting of Local Area Coordinators and the main coordinator. Further regular meetings have been planned to make joint decisions about CENTs policies. CENTs also hosted the 2013 LETS National Conference in Tasmania. This involved substantial discussion about ways all the groups can work together to grow the LETS movement in Australia, including sharing policy ideas. There were nine groups from around Australia represented at the conference. Although there are no definitive figures on exactly how many groups exist that identify as a LETS group in Australia, the community

exchange website states there are 50 Australian groups that use the CES platform, although many of these groups are currently inactive.<sup>116</sup>

Below the management level, deliberation in terms of debate about matters relating to public policy is fairly ad hoc and highly informal. However with regards to the indicator of purposeful social interaction, both everyday trading and social events are significant ways of promoting this interaction. Members come to know and trust each other when they regularly trade goods and services via CENTs. The social events, a minimum of 12 per year, also facilitate significant social interaction. Many of the comments quoted in the section of interviewee comments and generalised reciprocity indicate this capacity of CENTs.

In the literature, studies such as by Jacob et al. (2004) and Collom (2005) confirm the basic aim of community currencies generally, including LETS to promote positive interaction, around specific purposes of socioeconomic exchange.

In relation to prosumption, I have observed a medium level of CENTs members engaging in the direct production of goods and services to help satisfy the needs of other members. In other words, while the statistics show that on average 21 trades are made every week, the statistics show that 65% have made 5 or less sales since they joined, and 35% have made 6 or more sales. Furthermore the statistic that 36% of members have never traded is indicative of the unevenness of prosumption. Indeed I observed a large spectrum of prosumption capacity, including many formally listing very little in the way of Offers, and others listing Offers but failing to satisfactorily provide the good or service when requested. On the other hand, many members do offer either a large range of goods and/or services, and/or focus on one or two in a highly committed way, such as spending a lot of time offering the particular good or service to others.

The broader LETS and general community currency literature reflects a similar picture, of some dedicated traders and therefore committed prosumers, but many with low levels of 'producing', or providing goods and services to others. Perhaps the seminal point is made by Colley (2012) in estimating that only 5% of the needs of members of community currency initiatives can be met via the initiative, that is, by other members.

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<sup>116</sup> See the community exchange website at [www.community-exchange.org](http://www.community-exchange.org).



This tends to result in two missed opportunities for deliberation, firstly the increased social interaction that can come from trading, and secondly the missed chance of acquiring increased knowledge from the act of producing goods and services for others.

Some of the comments from the CENTs interviews reflected views that greater levels of prosumption are needed, such as:

We just have to get more people joining, more people trading and plant ideas on a regular basis for what people can offer and to encourage people to list wants that others can help with (R2)

Likewise:

My product is a selective service and so I probably need to think outside the square a bit more to increase my chances for participation and for others to take up my products and services. The limited offerings do restrict trading possibilities (R4)

Another comment indicated how LETS can be a springboard for prosumption:

Since joining CENTs I have been spending time on ideas for how I can restart the business trading mainly in CENTs currency. I would particularly like to do a PDC [permaculture design course] and have Permaculture design and consultancy as a CENTs offering (R2)

Taking all these findings into consideration, a medium rating was given for the potential of LETS to foster the norm of deliberation due to the medium level of evidence of purposeful social interaction, and of prosumption.

Rating: Medium

## Conclusion

LETS has a strength in fostering the norm of generalised reciprocity, and a weakness in fostering the norm of equity. Overall however, LETS appears to have a medium-to-high level of capacity to foster the four sustainability norms. The features of LETS that help foster these norms are volunteering, redistribution via subsidies, wage equality, localisation, the sharing, recycling and reuse of resources, purposeful social interaction and prosumption.

## 7. Comparing the case studies

### Introduction

The previous chapter applied the comparative framework to the two case studies to separately assess their capacity to address each of the sustainability norms. This chapter takes the results of that analysis to compare the two case studies of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS) in terms of their potential to foster sustainability norms. I have contended that sustainability can be enhanced by the use of community socioeconomic initiatives (CSIs) to promote the four sustainability norms of generalised reciprocity, equity, efficiency, and deliberation. While it is theorised that community socioeconomic initiatives have the potential to promote a procedural approach to sustainability by strengthening community sanctioning processes of social approval and disapproval, it is the capacity of CSIs to promote a substantive approach that is the focus of this dissertation. In relation to the substantive approach, the degree to which CSIs can directly foster the four sustainability norms largely depends on how much their aims align with the four norms, as well as how effectively schemes deliver on those aims in practice.

The potential of CSIs is based particularly on their capacity to increase cooperative relationships for mutual benefit via generalised reciprocity. This in turn increases societal capacity via collective action, and can decrease the emphasis of the role of consumption and increase the role of prosumption. This combination may increase the likelihood of increasing norms of efficiency and equity. Localisation is identified as a key to increasing cooperation (via social sanctioning) and in turn underpins all the other sustainability norm indicators. This chapter aims to compare the capacity of the two case studies to foster the sustainability norms via promoting these elements.

The chapter is structured as follows: The first section summarises the comparison of the case studies. The second section compares CSA with LETS for each norm. There are two sub-sections for each norm. Firstly there is a comparison between how well the ideal aims of each CSI align with each of the norms. Secondly there is a comparison of the extent to which the relevant indicators are promoted by the CSIs in practice. The third section proposes a typology for CSIs based on breadth

and depth of material provisioning. The fourth section discusses ways of strengthening the capacity of CSA and LETS to foster sustainability norms. The final section provides the conclusion to the chapter.

### Comparison of CSA and LETS

Overall, LETS can be seen to have greater capacity than CSA to foster the sustainability norms. Table 8 below shows the comparison of the two case studies. Firstly, there are significant differences between the ratings for the ideal version of each case study and how they are generally practised. This difference reflects the level of mainstream norms prevalent in society, including negative exchange, inequity, inefficiency and social and political disengagement. These all reduce the capacity of CSIs to achieve progress towards sustainability norms. A second point is the differential capacity of the two CSIs to achieve depth and breadth of social provisioning. I argue that the four sustainability norms can usefully be put into two categories: firstly generalised reciprocity and deliberation, and secondly equity and efficiency. Generalised reciprocity and deliberation require attention to what we expect from each other and of ourselves. Equity and efficiency focus more directly on how we produce and distribute goods and services.

**Table 8: Comparison of ratings between CSA and LETS**

Criterion	CSA		LETS	
	Ideal	Actual	Ideal	Actual
<b>Generalised reciprocity</b>	Medium	Low-Medium	High	Medium
<b>Equity</b>	High	Low-Medium	Low-Medium	Low
<b>Efficiency</b>	Medium-High	Medium	High	Low
<b>Deliberation</b>	Medium	Low	Medium-High	Medium

The shaded boxes in table 8 indicate which CSI has the greater strengths in fostering the particular norm. Table 8 shows that CSA is likely to have greater

capacity to promote equity and efficiency via redistribution, localisation and dematerialisation, while LETS appears to be more able to promote generalised reciprocity and deliberation via volunteering, purposeful social interaction and prosumption

The next section compares in greater detail the comparative capacity of the two CSIs to foster each of the four sustainability norms. Each section commences with a table showing a summary of the comparison, again the shaded box indicates the CSI that has greater capacity to foster the particular norm.

### Generalised reciprocity

Table 9: - Summary of comparison of fostering of reciprocity

Criteria	CSA		LETS	
	Ideal	Actual	Ideal	Actual
Reciprocity	Medium	Low-Medium	High	Medium

#### *Ideal*

My analysis concludes that LETS has greater capacity to promote generalised reciprocity in its ideal form than CSA. Generalised reciprocity is at the very core of LETS, whereby it is based on a hybrid form of exchange which reinforces the idea of the importance of giving to others both directly and indirectly as a result of receiving. A core concept of LETS is mutual credit, where one person contributing to the needs of others creates a credit for them and an obligation of the debtor to repay the favour. As Briceno and Stagl (2006) note, LETS is a “socially orientated and participatory program” (p 1544), and social interaction and volunteering via localisation is at the core of both the ideal and how it is practised. It is likely that the broader the range of activities provided by the CSI, the easier it may be to attract volunteers. In contrast, CSA is based on market exchange, and has fewer opportunities for involvement of the shareholders, particularly in terms of less compulsion to be involved. It focuses on a narrower range of activities than LETS.

As far as its ideal aims, therefore, LETS shows greater capacity than CSA to foster generalised reciprocity.

### *Practice*

There are two ways that LETS can promote volunteering. The first is by members providing goods and services directly to each other without requiring payment. Since LETS promotes the local producing and trading of food (vegetables, value added goods, eggs, meat etc), clothing, transport, a large range of services such as child minding, book keeping, house cleaning, computer assistance and so on, there is a large diversity of ways that members can engage in social provisioning without a formal agreement of receiving a return.

The second way is the traditional type of volunteering in terms of helping with the many management tasks of running a LETS initiative, again without requiring payment. Both of these opportunities offer considerable scope in terms of diversity of ways that LETS members can offer goods and services. In addition, the focus LETS has on social interaction may increase the willingness for members to provide free goods and services to others, due to increased trust. I observed a medium level of these two types of volunteering in LETS. At the management level, there is a relatively substantial level of volunteering, but much less so among general members.

CSA can only provide volunteering opportunities for shareholders to help manage the initiative. Furthermore, the evidence shows a lack of shareholders willing to volunteer their time to assist with the management tasks. There is a lower level of compulsion to volunteer, since a lack of assistance with management tasks will not necessarily threaten the viability of a CSA initiative, rather, it impacts on the capacity of the CSA to achieve broader ecological and socioeconomic goals beyond the provision of local food.

With regards to the dominant type of exchange, LETS predominantly uses a hybrid form of exchange between generalised reciprocity and market exchange as the main medium of exchange, although there is still some level of national money used. However, once people connect with other members via their membership of CENTs, for example, they do tend to engage in increased free giving of their goods

and services to others, rather than record it as a formal transaction<sup>117</sup>. In the ideal version of CSA, the normal market exchange principles are modified in terms of pricing, reflecting less of a competitive relationship and more of a cooperative relationship. In practice, pricing ranges from being based on shareholders' ability to pay, to being based on market rates. However in both cases, CSA still relies on market exchange and national money, albeit a more cooperative form of exchange.

This confirms that overall LETS appears to have greater capacity to foster generalised reciprocity than CSA.

## Equity

Table 10: Summary of comparison of fostering of equity

Criterion	CSA		LETS	
	Ideal	Actual	Ideal	Actual
Equity	High	Low-Medium	Low-Medium	Low

### *Ideal*

The ideal form of CSA includes a concern about equity to a considerable extent, in that it aims for associative economics as a guiding principle<sup>118</sup>. Therefore there is the ideal at least to ensure the needs of others are catered for. This is predominantly via those with greater purchasing power subsidising those with less, to help the latter access healthy food that they otherwise may not have been able to access.

The formal aims of LETS however, tend not to explicitly address equity per se, and the emphasis rather tends to be on those who can offer goods and services to trade, which in part depends on people's confidence both in what they can offer others and in joining groups with which they may not fully identify. With regards to the redistributive potential of CSA, this mainly occurs via subsidising low income

<sup>117</sup> Personal communication, Tania Brookes.

<sup>118</sup> Groh and McFadden (1997) in particular promote associative economics as a foundational principle of CSA.

participants by offering free or reduced-price shares; giving away surplus produce and unclaimed boxes, and/or offering work-shares to reduce the price of the boxes (Perez et al., 2003). Also, the recent turn of CSA towards community food security<sup>119</sup> emphasises a concern for food security for all, not just those who can afford to pay. Hinrichs and Kremer (2002) for example, highlight the use of subsidies in their case study of CSA to allow lower socioeconomic groups to access food.

LETS is characterised by the significant failing of many community initiatives to be inclusive, of attracting mainly those who would be considered ‘middle class’. Exclusivity is compounded by the current inability for anyone to register unless they can, at least in theory, offer one good or service. Overall, CSA appears to have greater capacity to promote equity, since there is a greater history, albeit mostly recently, of addressing exclusion than for LETS.

## Efficiency

Table 11 - Summary of comparison of fostering of efficiency

Criterion	CSA		LETS	
	Ideal	Actual	Ideal	Actual
Efficiency	Medium-High	Medium	High	Low

### *Ideal*

The most commonly cited major aim of CSA is the localisation of food. Hence it promotes the consumption of ‘dematerialised’ food in terms of lower material inputs required for the packaging, preserving, transport and display of food. Since CSA focuses on the single type of provisioning, it can facilitate deeper learning about the sustainable growing and distributing of foods on a local basis.

A common issue with LETS is the low amount of goods and services that can be provided locally, hence LETS tends to focus more on regional rather than local provisioning. The ideal version of LETS, however, involves a much greater capacity at the local level to provide for needs, hence greater localisation and hence

<sup>119</sup> Perhaps most commonly in the USA.

potential reduction of resource inputs. This points to one interpretation of community building as the building of the capacity of communities to provide for their own needs.

### *Practice*

Likewise in practice, CSA shows greater potential than LETS to foster the norm of efficiency due to its greater localisation capacity. This is particularly the case for those CSAs that provide other products apart from fruit and vegetables, such as eggs, meat, dairy, honey and so on. To some extent it is easier to localise food than it is to localise many other goods and services. This is in particular because it is mainly access to a suitable growing area that is required to produce food, as opposed to, for example, expensive machinery to produce some other types of goods. For example, the model of Neighbourhood Supported Agriculture (NSA) utilises residential backyards, and practices such as seed saving, seed swapping and compost making can lower the production costs further.<sup>120</sup>

As well as decreasing material inputs of transport, CSA can increase relative dematerialisation via the use of sustainable growing techniques, and via less packaging of the produce. The vast majority of CSAs use either organic or biodynamic growing techniques, where instead of using material inputs such as herbicides and pesticides, labour tends to be used to a higher degree, which is also more likely to preserve healthy ecosystems relative to the use of chemicals. LETS can promote relative dematerialisation via the sharing, recycling and reuse of resources, which is a common practice in LETS. However again here LETS may have less capacity than CSA because it does not have the single focus on one provisioning activity and tends to involve provisioning at the regional level rather than at the local level.

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<sup>120</sup> This applies to CSA as well as NSA.



## Deliberation

Table 12 - Summary of comparison of fostering of deliberation

Criterion	CSA		LETS	
	Ideal	Actual	Ideal	Actual
<b>Deliberation</b>	Medium	Low	Medium-High	Medium

### *Ideal*

A core notion of CSA is of increased interaction between farmers and consumers, and between consumers. While increased interaction may not necessarily lead to increased participation in decision-making, it is a necessary precursor. Since there is very little compulsion however for this increased interaction, nor for prosumption, CSA appears to lack some capacity to promote purposeful social interaction and hence deliberation.

LETS has greater capacity to promote purposeful social interaction in part because of its emphasis on the social, economic and ideological motivations. For example, a core feature of LETS groups is the holding of trading days. These trading days are frequently more than just about trading, commonly a shared meal is involved, and many groups use these events as an opportunity for education generally relating to sustainability. The showing of documentary films at a trading event is one example towards this aim. With regards to promoting prosumption, again LETS has significantly greater capacity in this regard. In the most common CSA model of one farmer growing for a group of shareholders, the actual provisioning remains solely or mostly with the farmer, even in the ideal model shareholders would not to any great extent become involved in production, beyond assistance with simple on-farm tasks.

### *Practice*

CSA tends to confine social interaction to food and farm related events, and at the small, local scale. This is limiting, particularly if the farm is only able to produce over summer and autumn, and if different CSA groups do not interact socially. LETS has a much broader scope and therefore greater opportunities for social interaction, which facilitates its fundamental vision of increasing cooperation via social interaction.

CSA also has quite limited capacity to promote prosumption. Generally in practice, farmers require minimal practical contribution from shareholders, and shareholders commonly do not seek to contribute in a production sense apart from a dedicated few. This is in part due to the significant separation between the production and consumption of food. In contrast there is perhaps less of a separation between production and consumption in the larger range of goods and services provided within LETS. LETS is based fundamentally on members being prosumers. Hence LETS is likely to have greater capacity overall to promote the norm of deliberation.

### A CSI typology proposal

The above analysis highlights that breadth and depth of social provisioning is one important distinction that can be made between different CSIs, which helps to point to their different capacities to foster the four sustainability norms. CSIs that focus on depth promote deep knowledge about the subject on which it is based. For example, community renewable energy initiatives require substantial knowledge about renewable energy, which is specialised technical knowledge. At the other end of the spectrum, intentional communities, where social provisioning and social interaction are at the greatest level of any CSI, have more of a focus on how people can work together. This comprises 'breadth', involving less of a focus on the technical aspects of provisioning.

As discussed previously, the four sustainability norms can be divided into two groups. Generalised reciprocity and deliberation forms the first group, which involve a focus on how we expect each other to act, and how we act as individuals. The second group of equity and efficiency is more concerned with the production and distribution of goods and services. It would seem that a CSI that is based on greater breadth of social provisioning may have greater capacity to promote generalised reciprocity and deliberation, in short predominantly because of greater opportunities for social (including purposeful social) interaction. CSIs focused on greater depth of social provisioning, in terms of providing a much narrower range such as a single good or service, may have greater capacity to foster the norms of equity and efficiency. Focusing on one basic need allows greater attention firstly on the technical aspect of reducing resource inputs into production, hence

increasing efficiency. Secondly it arguably allows greater attention on how particularly low socioeconomic groups can gain access to the particular need satisfier.

It is important to note however that this possible typology based on depth and breadth is still tentative and would need further research to confirm or refute its validity. However it does point to potential synergies and for CSIs based on depth to become part of CSI based on breadth. Thus, for example, CSA farms could become members of a LETS initiative, and a LETS initiative in turn could become part of an intentional community.

Depth and breadth are important features of CSIs which are difficult to achieve within the one type of initiative<sup>121</sup>, hence combining different CSIs which have different levels of capacity to promote either depth or breadth is important. Depth allows greater learning to occur in technical areas important for sustainability, thereby increasing efficiency, such as renewable energy or low input agriculture. Breadth on the other hand, covers a wider range of activities without focussing on a particular activity. CSIs incorporating breadth tend to focus more on the way people interact, as evident for example in LETS and intentional communities. It is difficult for the one CSI to explicitly focus on both breadth and depth. However more complex initiatives can, particularly once they reach a larger scale, incorporate enhanced technical learning within a broader framework based on new ways of organising social relationships. Intentional communities are one example, who may have 'sub-projects' focussing on sustainable agriculture.

This discussion highlights that there are both advantages and disadvantages of a narrow but deep focus on one specific type of social provisioning versus a type of CSI which focuses more on processes of social exchange. It is, however, recognised that there is overlap both between the sustainability norms, and between social provisioning in terms of the technical aspects, and processes of social exchange. In particular, equity is an issue that cuts across both CSIs which focus on depth and those that focus on breadth.

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<sup>121</sup> One approach however is for CSIs with depth to become part of a CSI which focuses on breadth, for example CSA farms could become members of a LETS initiative. This is a longer term goal of the CSIs in North-West Tasmania.

## Strengthening the capacity of CSA and LETS to foster sustainability norms

The two case study CSIs were identified as particularly important examples of CSIs essentially because of the importance to sustainability of the production, distribution and consumption of food, and of money as an exchange medium. Two aspects of modern life that have become normalised are, firstly, attaining most of the satisfiers of our material needs via long supply chains; and secondly, of using a state controlled form of money to mediate exchange in these long supply chains. Both of these are problematic and can in part be addressed by community provisioning of food and community control of exchange media.

An important finding was that the two CSIs had different capacities to foster each of the norms, that is, they both had weaknesses and strengths. The diverse aims of different CSIs mean that CSIs will vary in the extent to which they are likely to foster each of the norms. With regards to the weaknesses, the following provides some recommendations for increasing the capacity of both CSA and LETs to foster sustainability norms. These recommendations can be applied to CSIs more broadly.

The main recommendation to strengthen the capacity of both CSA and LETS is in the related aspects of management structures and of leadership. For instance, CSAs would benefit from the establishment of a strong core management group which can then organise much greater opportunities for social interaction, and for members to interact with the farmer/s and the farm. Generalised reciprocity might then increase as a side effect of this activity. The promotion of the philosophy of associative economics could also assist CSA members to better contextualise how CSA fits within a wider social movement for change. More broadly a strong management team<sup>122</sup> would have increased capacity to promote the advantages of the particular CSI such as increased friendship and trust.

A crucial aspect of leadership is leading by example, whereby CSIs give the opportunity for leaders to emerge who lead by example. According to Colbert et al (2008), leaders need ‘communal motives’, that is, are concerned with the welfare of other people, with understanding and meeting the needs of others. The

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<sup>122</sup> Strong management teams tend to combine those highly committed to assisting with the success of an initiative, and having the skills to do so. Leadership, planning, marketing, and administration are examples of the tasks a strong management team would either undertake directly or oversee.

corollary is as Simpson and French (2006) note that leaders 'must endeavour to understand what the system - group, team or organization - requires' (p 246). To the extent CSIs can attract these kind of leaders, they will be more successful.

LETS for example could enhance its capacity to foster generalised reciprocity by promoting and developing the role of local area coordinators, and by establishing local area coordination teams. Local area coordination teams would much more effectively cover the range of tasks required of a local area coordinator. This includes recruiting new members, organising social events, brokering trading, general promotion, and contributing to a newsletter. An important component is ensuring leaders have the range of skills required, including communication, marketing, and administrative skills, but most of all a deep commitment to the LETS ideals.

Better management and increased leadership could help capitalise on the opportunity LETS provides to overcome the gap between those who have spare time, (including unemployed, under-employed, retirees and so on) and the significant need for the allocation of time to address ecological and socioeconomic problems. Ultimately one aim is cosmopolitan, prosumer localisation.<sup>123</sup> The common comment of 'I don't have time' which prevents many people from deeper engagement with volunteering via CSIs, indicates that when people gain discretionary time via unemployment, this may help overcome the time deficit. Both CSIs could increase their capacity to foster generalised reciprocity by emphasising the non-material benefits of volunteering such as increased friendships that can arise from volunteering.

One of the interviewees did point to one feature of the CES system which they stated can increase trust between members, which is the recommendation system. The CES provides the opportunity to comment on goods and services provided by other members. This is one area that management could develop a policy on with regards to how the recommendation system could be used in one sense as a sanctioning tool. In other words, verbally rewarding those who do behave as

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<sup>123</sup> This is an ideal of increased goodwill towards psychologically and physically distant 'others', of increased involvement in provisioning, and of greater consumption of local goods and services wherever possible.

desired by the community, and verbally punishing those who do not<sup>124</sup>. (Zasu, 2007)The latter would need to be handled very sensitively; if not handled appropriately it may be a disincentive to participation.

In relation to the capacity of CSA to foster equity norms, the use of working shares is one way to increase access to local food by lower socioeconomic groups, although there can be problems with shareholders working on the farm who may lack the necessary skills. This highlights the use of training for shareholders to gain the necessary skills. There are also other non-farm related jobs that CSA organisations require which could add opportunities to provide working shares.

With regards to the capacity of LETS to promote redistribution and hence equity, firstly the requirements for membership could be changed to allow those who cannot immediately identify an offer to still be able to register. By becoming a member they could then be encouraged to progress towards offering something of value to others that they may have trouble identifying themselves. For example, they may have spare assets such as a spare room in their house and hence could offer accommodation, or have a car they do not fully utilise that could be made available to others.<sup>125</sup> <sup>126</sup> They also could be assisted in undertaking training allowing them to offer the particular skill to others. Another opportunity is thinking laterally about what can be recognised as providing value. For example, companionship is often not recognised as something that provides a high level of value, however there are likely to be people who would like increased companionship and others who may struggle to offer many services, but may be able to offer companionship.

An option to encourage low socioeconomic groups to participate is the creation of LETS sub-groups consisting of people who know each other well, so that this sub-group trades amongst themselves, with the aim of gradually increasing trade with

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<sup>124</sup> This process is described by Zasu (2007), and is also reflected in Ostrom's (2010) work. To my knowledge, no groups have progressed very far in implementing such a system, however if sufficient thought is given to the design, particularly substantial communication and incremental introduction, it can reconstruct how communities regulate their members. One caveat on whether this can be successful or not is the size of the group, the smaller the group the greater the capacity to sanction each other without triggering adverse reactions from those being sanctioned. In short, the greater the trust that can be generated.

<sup>125</sup> It is recognised that there issues, for example insurance needs to be attended to for some types of exchange such as involving privately owned assets.

<sup>126</sup> This is not to suggest that those who have no difficulty in identifying goods and services they can offer should not also be encouraged to list spare assets as Offers.

others. The trading within the sub-group however would obviously be limited to goods and services those in the group could provide. Another option is to gradually promote an increase of social interaction outside of the LETS group to increase trust between groups with different socio-economic characteristics. A final option is to facilitate one-on-one brokerage, helping disadvantaged individuals identify what they can offer to others, as well as what they need from others. This does however require skilled brokers, and the resources to support brokerage.

To increase the capacity of CSA to foster the norm of efficiency, core management groups could increase their efforts to promote education about the importance of supporting farmers to grow ecologically. This would include encouragement to help with on-farm work. LETS can foster efficiency via dematerialising by increasing the capacity of individuals to be prosumers <sup>127</sup>and therefore increasing the range of goods and services than can be provided locally. Greater interaction between different CSAs, including greater organisation at the national and international level would assist in increasing purposeful social interaction and hence promote deliberation.

Strengthening core groups could also assist with increasing prosumption amongst CSA members. In turn if CSA members had a greater role in helping on the farms, in publishing newsletters, recruiting new members and so forth, this is likely to increase their capacity to deliberate with others due to increased experience and knowledge. Likewise, LETS can enhance its capacity to foster deliberation by strengthening local area coordination. In particular, this would enable a greater focus on organising trading events. These events can include the discussions on specific aspects of LETS policies, or broader discussions in particular on issues relevant to sustainability. There is a range of strategies that could increase prosumption via LETS. These include implementing a 'buddy' and/or mentoring system to help members acquire particular skills. Providing training such as via workshops is another possible strategy. A third strategy is making links to groups such as Men's and Women's Sheds who may be able to encourage the gaining of

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<sup>127</sup> This is a huge and very interesting topic in itself.

skills necessary for members to increase the range of goods and services they can offer<sup>128</sup>.

Overall, the results of this research highlight increasing horizontal interaction firstly both with other CSIs of the same type in other geographic areas, and with other types of CSIs. Secondly vertical interaction in particular with all levels of government can increase the effectiveness of CSIs in general, and help to foster specific sustainability norms such as deliberation, particularly in terms of joint decision making. Sometimes there may not be sufficient knowledge within a locality for sound decision making, therefore drawing on outside resources is important.

Overcoming the parochialism of communities identified as an important goal of CSIs is in fact one important element of sustainability leaders. As will be discussed later in this chapter, future research could further investigate the concept of CSI leadership. This may help address the issue of a lack of participation from different groups in CSIs. Since CSIs rely to a large extent on volunteers, it is often those with financial security who tend to participate, in other words who can afford to volunteer. The perception that CSIs are therefore exclusive can be reinforced by an 'us' and 'them' mentality, where people may be reluctant to interact voluntarily with people from different backgrounds. Addressing this problem requires a systematic approach, combining ways of ensuring people feel more comfortable interacting with people with different backgrounds (for instance de-emphasising the differences during exchange), and ensuring asking people to contribute in monetary terms does not exclude those on low incomes.

## Conclusion

There are three major findings resulting from this comparison of the capacity of CSA and LETS to foster sustainability norms. The first is that there is a significant difference between the ideal version of each scheme as represented in the literature and how they are practised on the ground. The challenge then becomes how to move practice closer to the ideal. Two important methods here are focusing on management systems, and on leadership<sup>129</sup>. The second major finding

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<sup>128</sup> These are strategies I have either identified myself, or have been suggested by other people in the CENTs project.

<sup>129</sup> This view arises from participant observation, and from the issues identified in the CSA literature.



is that overall, LETS appears to have greater capacity to foster all four sustainability norms. This is related to the closer alignment LETS has with the norms of generalised reciprocity, equity, efficiency and deliberation, and its ideological attraction, hence overall it scores higher against the indicators. CSA on the other hand tends to focus on a narrower purpose, particularly in on-ground initiatives on the provisioning and consumption of healthy food, with less of a focus on the sustainability norms. The third finding is that the two types of CSIs differ significantly in the capacity to foster individual norms. One main way they differ is in terms of the range of economic needs that they aim to satisfy. CSIs that only aim to satisfy either a single or small range of material needs, in other words they focus on depth of social provisioning, are able to pay greater attention to how that need is satisfied. Hence more attention can be paid in particular to minimising the resource use in producing the good or service. These CSIs have greater capacity to foster the norms of equity and efficiency. However CSIs that do not have a focus on a single or small number of economic needs, that is they involve breadth of social provisioning, are likely to have a greater focus on the social interaction which underpins generalised reciprocity and deliberation. Therefore to maximise the capacity of CSIs to foster all four sustainability norms, combining CSIs that either involve depth or breadth will be more successful than focusing on CSIs that only involve depth or breadth.

## 8. Insights and implications

### Introduction

This dissertation sought to address the questions of which norms might assist progressing towards sustainability, what the potential of community socioeconomic initiatives is to foster these norms, and how CSIs differ in their capacity to foster sustainability norms. Along with analysing the literature, two case studies were examined using participant observation, supplemented with key informant interviews to answer these questions. Firstly I have contended that a new sustainability paradigm is emerging, based on sustainable wellbeing. Generalised reciprocity, equity, efficiency and deliberation were identified as four norms important for sustainable wellbeing, in particular to maximise the chances of the allocation of an equitable share of resources for current generations, other species and future generations.

There are at least three reasons for focusing on generalised reciprocity as important for sustainability. To recap the framing borrowed from Sahlins (1972) of generalised reciprocity, it is defined as giving in response indirectly to receiving, in other words, of not requiring a contractual arrangement before providing value to others. The first reason for identifying it as a sustainability norm is that generalised reciprocity provides the ultimate means of interdependence; without generalised reciprocity, no individual would be motivated to help another to satisfy their needs. The second related reason is that generalised reciprocity lowers exchange costs (commonly called transaction costs). The main alternative to generalised reciprocity of using contracts to facilitate exchange incurs higher costs of developing, monitoring and enforcing contracts. The third reason is that generalised reciprocity is the basis for social sanctioning systems, which in turn are the basis of effective fostering of other sustainability norms.

Localisation is highlighted as a major means by which CSIs can directly foster all four norms of generalised reciprocity, equity, efficiency and deliberation. Face-to-face relationships, made more salient by increased social provisioning, particularly via prosumerism, decrease the likelihood of the negative exchange occurring. In turn we are motivated to maintain face to face localised relationships because these are the most important for satisfying our non-material needs. In addition,

environmental protection is enhanced when we source our material need satisfiers as locally as is possible. Localisation (and community organisation more generally) involves drawing boundaries around what responsibilities we have to whom. If we draw this boundary too large we are unable to allocate sufficient resources (for example time) to those most important for our survival and thriving. Localisation, of course, has its limits, and defensive localism (drawing very small moral circles, and failing to show respect to those beyond the circle) is an ever present danger (Laham, 2009). Uncertainty tends to increase the extent we draw small circles (Everingham, 2011). Ultimately however, it is our relationships of mutual support that are of critical importance (Bruni, 2008).

This final chapter comprises of six sections. The first section summarises the concept of sustainability as wellbeing, reiterating that a new paradigm must be found to replace the outdated paradigm of economic growth as sufficient to guide human individual and collective action. The second section restates the significance of community with regards to the fostering of sustainability norms and then summarises how community socioeconomic initiatives can build on the capacity of communities to foster sustainability norms. The third summarises the theoretical contribution of the thesis. The fourth discusses the limitations of the research. The fifth section suggests areas of future research, and the final section provides concluding comments.

### Sustainability as wellbeing

The initial proposition of this dissertation is that if sustainability efforts are focused on human wellbeing, the human species will have a greater chance of survival. The concept of sustainable wellbeing refers to the equitable and efficient meeting of socioeconomic needs. One caveat is the importance of a focus on a deliberative and experimental journey towards clarifying the requirements for wellbeing. A promising beginning for this journey is to focus on how to ensure the level of positive social relationships needed for interdependence, in other words how to maximise generalised reciprocity. Balanced exchange, in the form of market exchange has led to significant increases in productivity as Adam Smith (in Smith, 1998) identified, in terms of capturing the benefits of economies of scale, and has led to enormous increases of standards of living, to the availability of a

huge array of consumer goods, and the ability to produce more with much less labour. But once we have social provisioning via the separation of production and consumption, distribution then becomes an issue, and the opportunity for some to gain benefits of socioecological provisioning without contributing themselves, in other words negative exchange then becomes an issue. Attempting to control negative exchange, which in particular incurs transaction or exchange costs, can use substantial resources, in other words reduce inefficiency.<sup>130</sup>

There can be seen to be two elements to negative exchange, firstly seeking benefits without contributing in return, and secondly of seeking benefits (consuming) beyond the point of diminishing marginal utility (as discussed in chapter two). The opposite of negative exchange is generalised reciprocity, predominantly referring to contributing without explicitly requiring the receipt of benefits for oneself. It can also point to being mindful of one's own consumption levels in the interests of equity and efficiency. I propose therefore that as well as generalised reciprocity, equity and efficiency are required to support generalised reciprocity towards sustainable wellbeing. A fourth sustainability norm of deliberation was identified in part to increase social and political engagement in a resource constrained, uncertain and complex world. Without these norms, generalised reciprocity cannot be sustained as a means of interdependence, in part to allow the opportunities for gains from specialisation and division of labour.

A focus on wellbeing or quality of life in the long term points to the priority of the equitable satisfying of basic needs, and which ultimately requires radical institutional change via the political system. The virtuous circle theory of change (Stutz, 2006) proposes that the mechanism for this institutional change involves community fostering of norms, then the joining together of community initiatives in coalitions to provide enough pressure for institutional change. However currently communities lack the capacity to use social sanctioning to the level needed to combat norms of negative exchange, inequity, inefficiency and social and political disengagement. This leads to the next section which includes a discussion of community socioeconomic initiatives as having potential to supplement the social sanctioning of communities.

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<sup>130</sup> The intention however is not to suggest that all transaction costs can or should be eliminated, rather that they can be minimised.

## The importance of community and community socioeconomic initiatives

Repeating Taylor's (2003) quote, that 'it is the organising of collective human effort that has the power to change things' (p 2), the question then becomes what motivates people to engage in collective effort. Communities can be seen as a means of channelling collective effort, and of providing the motivation, as Hinrichs and Kremer (2002) state, of belonging to and having ongoing interaction with others within a community. The concept of boundaries is important to the debate regarding community, which becomes more salient when community is seen as a kind of extended family. We are more or less confident that the members of the communities we belong to will make an extra effort to look after us, which then adds to our motivation to reciprocate. But as noted previously, we then tend to treat those outside our communities as having less worth. This is a dilemma of human existence of a tendency to treat outsiders differently (Kimbrough and Wilson, 2013). One important aspect of CSIs is their capacity to increase 'cosmopolitanism' (Kenny, 2016) to overcome this problem, in increasing social interaction between otherwise strangers, hence ideally increasing trust. In social capital terminology, this means increased bridging and linking relationships (Reimer et al., 2008).

People who have face to face relationships have access to a greater level of feedback about the effect of their actions within these relationships, and therefore may be less likely to act self-interestedly than in anonymous, distant relationships. This is encapsulated by the term of 'decreasing circles of moral concern' (Laham, 2009). Of course face to face relationships do not eliminate self-interest but can substantially reduce it. At another level, Briceno and Stagl (2006) state that 'social interaction has been found to exert the most influence on attitudes and behaviour' (p 1543), whereby face-to-face communication is deemed as the single greatest factor in increasing the likelihood of cooperation. A further related element of significance is that generalised reciprocity capitalises on the considerable surpluses of capacity and energy evident in recent times via voluntarism. This is alluded to by Walmsley's (2012) use of the term of 'cognitive surplus'. The alternative of exchange based on contracts has less capacity to mobilise the spare energy that often resides in communities (Walmsley, 2012).

By way of confirming the potential of CSIs, Turner et al. (1999) note that ‘social science research has demonstrated that [neighbourhood] associations are usually the most significant vehicles for changing both the attitudes and behavior of people ... They set norms and provide incentives for new forms of action.

Therefore, they are critical forums for shaping community attitudes’ (p 4). Their use of the term neighbourhood association is very similar to the concept of CSI.

There may be an optimal level of generalised reciprocity required for societies to function based on interdependence. This is an insight of socioeconomics that the economy depends on a minimum level of non-economic, or social capacity, in particular for effective socialisation and hence fostering of pro-socioecological norms. Currently it appears that these levels may be inadequate to generate sufficient levels of beneficial exchange.<sup>131</sup> This is partly related to communities being less and less able to meet material needs on a local basis. Most households rely on a large amount of goods and many services being provided from afar.

Where production is a social activity, production can increase interaction and add to the cohesiveness of communities. Community socioeconomic initiatives, defined as place--based communities aiming to meet socioeconomic needs within the community, largely via relationships based on generalised reciprocity, are therefore highlighted as having the capacity to increase community cohesion by providing a purpose for members of communities to interact. One main significance of CSIs is therefore their increased focus on economic as well as social goals.

Specifically with regard to fostering norms, CSIs can directly foster particular sustainability norms, under the substantive approach, related to the extent that the aims of the CSI align with the norms. CSIs can also promote a procedural approach of increasing community’s capacity for purposeful social interaction and deliberation, facilitating greater capacity to decide on, monitor and enforce norms.

Four norms were identified as likely priorities for progressing towards the maintenance of functioning environmental, economic and social systems.

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<sup>131</sup> Particularly considering challenges such as climate change which require significant levels of cooperation.

Generalised reciprocity refers to giving indirectly in response to receiving. Social sanctioning via communities is a common means of enforcing the norm of generalised reciprocity. Trust refers to the confidence that individuals will act according to generalised reciprocity, without requiring a contract to enforce providing value in return of receiving value. Generalised reciprocity amounts to contributing value without requiring a material return, and includes taking account of the needs of others. It requires balancing one's own self-interest with the interests of others. Generalised reciprocity is identified as the 'operating system of society'; whereby having trust that others will repay their debts as a means of exchange is vital for our interdependent way of life. Volunteering is identified as one of the main indicators of generalised reciprocity. Money is arguably losing a level of trust in being able to facilitate cooperative relationships on which interdependence is based (Greco,2009). In any case, money involves greatly increased transaction costs than generalised reciprocity. The other three sustainability norms are to some extent necessary for generalised reciprocity to be sustained as much as is possible as a medium of exchange in its own right, and to reduce the transaction costs that accompany the use of national money.

Equity is necessary for generalised reciprocity since individuals will be reluctant to exchange with others if they perceive they are being unfairly or inequitably treated via the exchange. More specifically equity is based on having access to sufficient level of goods and services to satisfy basic needs. This requires redistribution from those who have access to resources well above the threshold beyond which more resources do not add to wellbeing, to those who lack access to sufficient resources to satisfy needs. Likewise efficiency is necessary for generalised reciprocity since using a greater amount of material input for a given good or service means a smaller pie for all, hence may result in decreased cooperation. Dematerialisation is identified as the indicator of efficiency, in terms of satisfying needs with as low resource intensity as possible<sup>132</sup>. This includes reducing consumption where possible to locally produced goods to minimise resources used for transport, packaging and so on. Finally deliberation is deemed

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<sup>132</sup> Voet et. Al. (2004) refer to absolute dematerialisation, when the total amount of material input is decreasing, and relative dematerialisation, which refers to a decrease of the material input per unit of gross domestic product. I contend both meanings are relevant in terms of efficiency.

necessary for participation in decision making about exchange and the other important rules by which interdependence can be maintained as a sustainable way of living. This refers in essence to participative decision making via purposeful social interaction. In short, the argument is that CSIs can directly foster the sustainability norms by promoting generalised reciprocity via volunteering, equity via redistribution, efficiency via localisation and dematerialisation and deliberation via purposeful social interaction and prosumption<sup>133</sup>. Since CSIs are in effect communities acting towards a specific purpose, this purpose provides the means around which communities can mobilise. Socioeconomics provides the lens with which the potential of CSIs to foster sustainability norms is analysed.

The recommendation is then to combine different CSIs to maximise the fostering of sustainability norms. Since volunteering, as an expression of generalised reciprocity is one of the important indicators of the capacity of CSIs to foster sustainability norms, and because people have differing interests, some will be motivated to volunteer to promote local food, some will want to explore and act further via LETS, some have passions in relation to renewable energy, and still others will want go even further still by basing their whole lifestyle in an intentional community or ecovillage. In advocating for a diversity of CSI initiatives, it is particularly important that these different types of CSIs communicate with each other in particular to share information, and to increase opportunities for social learning<sup>134</sup>.

#### Theoretical contribution

This section identifies three main areas where this dissertation contributes to the literature regarding socioeconomic perspectives of sustainability. The first is a particular interpretation of sustainability and the challenges it poses, including highlighting the need for a new concept of the ultimate policy goal for governments. A socioeconomic perspective is considered to be valuable given that sustainability relates to how we satisfy our material or economic needs, as well as our non-material, particularly our social needs. Sustainability has become yet

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<sup>133</sup> Seyfang and Smith (2007) are prominent in supporting the argument of the potential of CSI's to change norms.

<sup>134</sup> While there has not been a great deal of communication and information sharing between CSIs to date, I have observed that there does appear to be increased recognition of the importance of improved communication and information sharing. For example at a Permaculture Conference in Tasmania in 2015 and at a LETS conference, there were sessions on both movements working more closely together.



another term which is interpreted and used according to particular interests, and therefore multiple interpretations exist given the wide range of interests amongst individuals. This dissertation however assumes a very clear definition of sustainability as referring to human survival and thriving. The great challenge to human survival and thriving is of reducing the collective human impact on the planets ecosystem to a level that does not irreparably damage those ecosystems. In particular our great challenge is trying to minimise changes to our climate systems to avoid reaching the point where human life can no longer be supported. The three legged approach says that as well as functioning ecosystems, a second leg is the wellbeing or functioning of individuals, and the efficiency requiring cooperation of our exchange systems is the third leg. This is a form of triple bottom line interpretations of sustainability, that we need functioning social systems within which individuals can thrive (most notably can balance self and other interest, be generalised reciprocators), functioning systems of exchange (economic, or more correctly, socioeconomic systems), and functioning ecosystems.

The second theoretical contribution is of highlighting fair and efficient exchange as crucial for sustainability, as the vital element enabling interdependence, in short as the pre-requisite for people to work together, rather than as isolated individuals trying to satisfy their own needs by all their own efforts. Generalised reciprocity is the basis of fair and efficient exchange, where each party does not insist on a particular return, thus has some flexibility about their 'rewards' for contributing to satisfying others' needs. The corollary is the identification of three further norms to support all three of the legs of sustainability. The norms of equity, efficiency and deliberation all help build systems of social protection and environmental protection. Another element of this contribution is the effectiveness of combining the power of the state (to punish 'bad' behaviour at arm's length) with the power of community (to capitalise on the need to belong to a group), in other words combining 'top down' and 'bottom up' solutions.

The third main area of contribution to socioeconomic sustainability theory is the identification of the importance of 'sustainable' food and 'sustainable' exchange/money to social, economic and environmental sustainability. The way

we produce food has substantial effects on the environment, including the resource intensity of the inputs used to produce food, and the distance food is transported from paddock to plate. A further issue is consumer preferences for cosmetically perfect food, of inadequate recognition of cosmetics as a sign of degradation of food, versus the appearance of food unrelated to quality, such as 'crooked carrots'. Secondly food has a high correlation to wellbeing in a number of ways. Physical health requires a healthy diet, while growing, harvesting and sharing food can be a significant source of mental health such as via positive social relationships. Local food systems aim to increase the environmental sustainability of how food is produced, as well as to capitalise on their significant capacity to increase cooperation, and the other three sustainability norms.

Money is significant since exchange is the basis of human interdependence, and a process is needed to ensure enough trust that people will abide by fair and efficient exchange. Money as commonly conceived is the means by which we try and maintain this level of trust, however conventional monetary systems are considered by some to be inherently unsustainable, or in any case are increasingly problematic. Community currencies not only aim to address the problems of money, they also aim to replace the role of 'consumer' with a role of 'prosumer'. To summarise the main theoretical contribution of this thesis, including the policy implications, community socioeconomic initiatives are identified as having potential to foster trust in generalised reciprocity, reduce the consumption of resources that do not add to wellbeing, and increase communicative interaction between people necessary to progress towards systems which are conducive to human survival and thriving, including to address diversity.

### Future research

There are a number of research questions that arise from this research which could be the subject of future study. Firstly research could be conducted in terms of the capacity of CSIs to indirectly (as opposed to directly as the subject of this dissertation) foster sustainability norms by increasing social sanctioning capacity. Secondly the framework could be applied to other CSIs such as intentional communities, community renewable initiatives and transition town initiatives.

Either single CSIs could be investigated, or a comparative study of two or more different CSIs could be conducted.

Thirdly further research could be conducted in relation to testing of the four sustainability norms identified, in terms of how much they resonate within the sustainability science field. For example, extensive interviews could be conducted with sustainability experts to test whether they concur with the four norms identified here as priority sustainability norms, or whether they identify different norms as current priorities towards sustainability. Also interconnections between the four norms could be further explored. For example the validity of my hypothesis of pairing generalised reciprocity and deliberation together, and equity and efficiency together, including the strength of their connections.

Fourthly another area of research could involve developing a full typology of CSIs. This could build on the preliminary typology presented in chapter seven, which identified depth and breadth of social provisioning as an important distinction between different CSIs.

Fifthly, since management and leadership appear to be important for CSIs to best foster sustainability norms, further research could be conducted in this area. For example, research into how management and leadership could be improved generally, and whether there are differences between different CSIs in relation to management and leadership are just two areas that could be investigated.

Sixthly more broadly socioeconomic and/or sociological research could investigate the relationships between social movements and community socioeconomic initiatives. Social movements have been highlighted as important for social change (Touraine, 2002), therefore research into how both social movements and community socioeconomic initiatives (recognising the concepts can overlap) can interact to further the mainstream adoption of sustainability norms would be beneficial. A final important area of research is the question of the benefits and limits of localisation. In one respect this will of course vary from locality to locality. One important question however is to what extent local supply can meet local demand via a combination of management (reduction or convergence) of demand, and import substitution. In addition, further research on the links between localisation and sustainability could be explored.

## Conclusion

Sustainability is ultimately related to cooperation based on mutual agreement on societal goals, and the equitable meeting of needs, using the least resources to conserve resources for other species and future generations. The immediate, urgent, and more visible challenges governments around the world are currently facing however include climate change, social dysfunction, economic stagnation and technological unemployment. These problems are part of the core issues for sustainability: how do we sustain our interdependent way of life while addressing these problems, in other words, how do we sustain our ecosystems, our social systems and our economic systems? Particularly as budget tightening, increasing debt and austerity become more salient, voluntary action via communities appears to be one avenue that has the potential to address complex and 'wicked' problems.

As Barnes (2015) says in relation to community currencies, '[i]t may become clearer that trustful arrangements are socially and operationally superior to the trustless scenarios beloved of Reagan and Thatcher's children; that once you expect the best of people they behave better; that currency users have both the right and the capability to manage their own means of exchange' (no pg). Barnes (2015) continues in proposing the term TAMARA (There Are Many Achievable Real Alternatives), to combat the previous term of TINA, the view that 'There Is No Alternative' (Offe, 2000).

The trust that Barnes (2015) refers to, according to Adler and Heckscher (2005) originates from and is maintained by (place-based) communities. Place-based community has been identified as an important means of fostering all four sustainability norms. In particular they can promote localisation and generalised reciprocity, two important concepts for this dissertation. Place-based communities however, who conform to the three criteria of jointly satisfying socioeconomic needs, engaging in systematic social sanctioning, and relating largely via generalised reciprocity appear to be in very small number, particularly in 'developed' countries (Gurstein,2000).<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Gurstein (2000) notes a difference between developing and developed countries regarding the strength of communities in satisfying the needs of their members, whereby in developing countries there is a higher degree of 'strong communities' that still exist.

In particular, modern 'pseudo-communities' tend to no longer focus on provisioning to satisfy material needs. There is a vast array of consumer goods which in the foreseeable future will always be manufactured elsewhere, however there is merit in providing a purpose for communities to unite, in working towards increased provisioning such as towards import substitution. A second weakness of communities throughout human history is an element of 'defensive localism', or parochialism whereby people from other localities may be discriminated against, in terms of treated less favourably than those within our communities. CSIs are particularly aimed at the first problem, and may indirectly help address the second. Finally an important finding of this dissertation was of the effectiveness of combining different types of CSIs. It is particularly important also that these different types of CSIs communicate with each other to facilitate not only localisation, but also social learning. It is via social learning that we can journey together towards sustainability.

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## Appendix A: Interview guide for sustainability interviews

### **Common questions for all interviewees:**

What is your rough definition of sustainability?

What are the major threats to sustainability? How serious are these threats?

Where does the responsibility lie in addressing sustainability e.g. with individuals, families, communities, local, state or federal government, business, and/or global institutions?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of addressing sustainability at these different levels?

Which academic disciplines/inter-disciplines in your opinion make the greatest contribution to the sustainability discourse?

Are there disciplines that could be emphasized more in discourses on sustainability? If so, which ones?

Where would it be most useful to direct most of the research effort in addressing sustainability?

What motivates you to be involved in the work you do? Where do you think your major contribution to sustainability emanates from?

### **Community practitioners/activists**

What is your community group aiming to achieve?

How successful has it been to date towards these aims?

If growth in terms of involving more people is one of your aims, what do you think are the main barriers to this?

## Appendix B: Interview guide for Community Exchange Network Tasmania (CENTs) evaluation

What have been your significant moments since joining the CENTs project?

Why were they significant?

What have been your significant moments in CENTs within the last three months?

Why were they significant?

What do you like about the CENTs project?

What could be improved with regards to the way the project is run?

What difference has participating in the project made to you to date in your day to day life and/or what difference could it make in the future?

Has your participation in CENTs made any difference to your skills and/or knowledge levels and/or could it in the future?

What do you see as the main barriers for you in participating in CENTs?

What do you see as the main opportunities for you in participating in CENTs?

How much do you think the success of CENTs depends on people being trustworthy?

Thinking about people in general how much do you think people can be trusted e.g. to keep their word?

How much do you think the people involved in CENTs can be trusted to keep their word?

What are the main things you think would increase trust levels in CENTs?

Do you have problems identifying what you can offer and what you could request?

Do you see your involvement in CENTs as an improvement to your life? e.g. learning a new hobby, engaging more in social activities, decreasing the time you spend doing things you dislike and spending more time doing things you do like?